

First Person Narration in the Modern Italian Novel

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I declare that the thesis is my  
own work and that it has been  
written by myself.



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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The aim of this thesis is to examine the technique of first person narration as it appears in the modern Italian novel. It begins by examining the concept of first person narrative as a narratological category and the means by which the first person pronoun as a grammatical feature comes, paradoxically, to function as a guarantor of identity and authenticity, constituted by both the individual act of memory and the location of the first person in history. Nievo's Le confessioni di un italiano is considered in this light as a paradigm of the retrospective roman-mémoires form. The thesis goes on to demonstrate the manner in which the subject's identity is jeopardized in Pavese's La luna e i falò and Bassani's Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini as memory, history and the self are revealed to be discursive, hence mobile products. In Calvino's Trilogy, the referential aspect of the narrative is abandoned completely and the first person narrator is shown to be a function of discourse, dependent on discourse for its position and constitution as subject. In Calvino's later work, this loss of subjectivity is represented more acutely as the self attempts to gain mastery over the discourse of the Other through a series of ludic strategies which conceal a more critical intent. Finally, the images of death which abound in these texts are incorporated by the narrators of Sciascia's Todo modo and Eco's Il nome della rosa in their ironic strategies to overcome their erasure in discourse. The major contention of this study is that first person narration represents more than a narratological category on the grounds that it functions as an enactment of the subject's entry into language and catalogues the subject's desire to create a self through the mastery of language and critically, through recognition by the Other. The thesis is informed particularly by the work in linguistics of Benveniste.

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## INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is to examine what Henry James referred to as 'the darkest abyss of romance' or what is more commonly and prosaically known as first person narrative.<sup>1</sup> At first sight, James' choice of phrase might appear perplexing, for the notion of first person narration is a widely-used, descriptive critical concept, the meaning of which seems too self-evident and perhaps too devalued to arouse any particular feelings of interest. It is merely a common-sense device for ordering texts: either a text is written in the third person or in the first. The distinction is one of fact and its use would seem to bear little trace of the sinister connotations suggested by James. What this study proposes to demonstrate, however, is the significance of this remark in the context of modern first person texts where the first person technique signifies more than mere narrative category. It will suggest that the I of such texts is indicative of an uncanny link between the self and narrative fiction, proposing the notion of the I as the locus of contradiction between the self and narrative, consequently casting a vertiginous glance into the abyss which lies between the two.

In his preface to The Ambassadors, James evinces a distinct dislike and contempt for the first person form, condemning in particular the looseness which its adoption entails. He does,

nevertheless, in his brief discussion allude to certain features of the form which will be of central importance to the issues which will be examined and which may serve here as an introduction. Firstly, he refers to the possibility of having made Strether, the main character of the novel, the 'hero and historian' of the tale. Immediately, we are made aware of a duality, structurally imperative to first person narrative. If the main character of a novel is to tell his own tale, he at once takes on a double function which necessitates a radical splitting, or perhaps duplication, of his role. 'Hero' inasmuch as he figures large within the text, he is also his own 'historian' and, consequently, embodies an authoritative role, responsible for the arrangement, disposition, authenticity and value of the narrative itself. In terms of the fiction, the dual role is also a temporal one, for it implies a relationship not only with historical time, but also with time as experience, a relationship between past and present selves. The result, as James points out, is that the first person narrator becomes endowed with 'the double privilege of subject and object', being figured both as the source of the text and as its main point of interest. The question of subjectivity, however, in first person narrative is one replete with difficulty and complexity, and will be discussed later in greater detail. He, once again, does enough in noting the splitting which occurs in the I of first person texts in the light of the apparently antithetical positions which it must occupy. Finally, James draws attention

to the fact that first person narrative unleashes what he calls 'the terrible fluidity of self-revelation', marking the last note of his disapproval. Without wishing to attribute such a notion of value to the form, it is nevertheless possible to recognise that the idea of 'self-revelation' to which James refers, is an essential feature of first person narrative. The questions raised point directly to the relationship between the self and language, and the manner in which the self functions in language. The idea of revelation also intimates the relationship which first person narrative fiction has with non-fictional genres such as autobiography, the memoir and confessional forms of writing, a relationship which critically determines its generation.

James' critique is based on his notions of 'showing' and 'telling', the two opposing modes in which he believes narrative may operate. His privileging of the former over the latter leads him to view first person narrative in terms of a supposed formlessness, a linguistic sprawl which is not conducive to the artistic presentation of narrative material. While not wishing to uphold his evaluative representation of the first person method, the features highlighted by him are not unworthy of further investigation. He focuses attention on the relationship between the narrator and the narrative material, a relationship which will be activated by the narrative text itself. He raises questions of authority, history and temporality which as will be demonstrated are crucial features of first person narrative.

Further, he also broaches the problems of self-representation, textual identity and the act of writing, all of which again will figure large in our investigation.

James was writing at a time when the first person form had largely gone into eclipse, and, in many ways, his critical work is proscriptive rather than descriptive or analytical. The historical reasons for the demise of the form and its more recent renaissance are complex and will only be alluded to sketchily.<sup>2</sup> Nor will it be our purpose to provide instruction in the technique of writing in the first person. What will be attempted in the first chapter of our study is an analysis of the concept of first person narrative. This will examine not only the issues alluded to by James, but will also examine the value of the concept as a critical tool, for not all critics accept the easy categorisation of first and third person as a valid or significant means for dividing texts. Wayne Booth, for instance, has remarked: 'To say that the story is told in the first person or the third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific events'.<sup>3</sup> Doubtless he is right, for merely to divide all texts into two opposing camps is a strategy devoid of import unless some further significance can be attributed to it.

Firstly, we shall try to be more precise in defining the

concept of first person narrative, which is more problematic than might at first appear. Secondly we shall examine the concept in terms of 'point of view' i.e. the relationship between the narrator and the text, for it is in this sphere that first person narrative has traditionally been discussed. This will lead on to an examination of the objective/subjective dichotomy in fiction, and within first person narrative in particular, before broadening out to deal with the questions of time and history in the first person novel, and its relation to similar, related genres; finally, we will broach the question of the narrator himself and his activity. This final aspect will prove crucial in the development of this study, for it represents the specific place in which the narration meets the narrative, and the conflicts revealed here will form the basis of our discussion when we turn our attention to specific texts.

The equivocal nature of the terms first and third person narrative is underlined by Genette in 'Discours du récit':

Ces locutions courantes me semblent en effet inadéquates en ce qu'elles mettent l'accent de la variation sur l'élément en fait invariant de la situation narrative, explication implicite de la 'personne' du narrateur qui ne peut être dans son récit, comme tout sujet de l'énonciation dans son énoncé, qu'à la première personne.<sup>4</sup>

These terms which masquerade behind a supposedly linguistic difference are shown to refer not to the narrative situation, but to whether or not an I or a he is posited as a textual object.

Third person narrative refers to a situation in which the narrator remains concealed whereas first person narrative is one which reveals the presence of its source. Third person narrative is thus the narrative which excludes an overt avowal of its source, but this exclusion can always be breached by the insertion of the narrator's I. Genette's typology of narrative situations will be examined later as, for the moment, it is enough to have highlighted an ambiguity inherent to our terminology.<sup>5</sup>

Not every narrator whose presence is revealed is commonly regarded as a first person narrator however. Kate Hamburger in a definition which is curiously self-fulfilling states: 'The first person narrative shall first be considered in its proper sense as an autobiographical form which reports events and experiences referred to by a first person narrator'.<sup>6</sup> Romberg offers an initial definition which is similar but more explicit: 'By a first person novel is meant a novel that is narrated all the way along in the first person by a person who appears in the novel, the narrator'.<sup>7</sup> This seems to suggest that in order to merit the appellation, the first person narrator must also appear as a character in the novel and not appear simply as a feature of discourse as is the case in Thackeray's Vanity Fair: 'The "I" that we encounter here does not form any organic part of the fiction; it stands to one side of it, or rather above it. It is not the "I" of a created character, but the "I" of the creator



himself' (5). The first person narrator therefore is not merely an authorial presence, but, more importantly, a presence within the narrated world itself. For Romberg, he is a feature of content rather than form.

The exact boundary between 'authorial' and 'narratorial' presence may be a feature difficult to determine. This is compounded by a further distinction Romberg makes between the first person narrator as 'main character' and the first person narrator as 'observer'. Instinctively, we may feel able to establish the distinction, but in practice the boundaries between main character, observer and author may slide imperceptibly into each other. Similar distinctions in first person technique were previously noted by Percy Lubbock in The Craft of Fiction.<sup>8</sup> Very much a Jamesian inspired critic, Lubbock is reluctant to approve any display of the first person in fiction. He berates Thackeray's authorial interventions, but more significantly notes too that the first person narrator can be either the centre of interest or serve as witness of great events. Only the latter instance is to be at all approved of, but previously Lubbock had remarked on the use of the form in a particularly interesting light:

The use of the first person, no doubt, is a source of relief to a novelist in the matter of composition. It composes of its own accord, or so he may feel; for the hero gives the story an indefeasible unity by the mere act of telling it. His career may not seem to hang together logically, artistically; but every part of it is at least united with every part by the coincidence of its all

belonging to one man. (131)

Despite generally agreeing with James' notion of the formlessness of first person narrative, Lubbock nevertheless upholds its essential unity by virtue of the existential link to a single identifiable source. This echoes Romberg's defence of organicism, but points also to a definition suggested by Dorrit Cohn in her work Transparent Minds.<sup>9</sup> She argues that it is possible to identify similarities in the relationship between the 'third person' narrator and his characters and that between the 'first person' narrator and his past self as character, but concludes that in the latter case, the narrator's 'two selves still remain yoked by the first-person pronoun. Their relationship imitates the temporal continuity of real beings, an existential relationship that differs substantially from the purely functional relationship that binds a narrator to his protagonist in third person fiction' (144) This 'existential relationship' which is itself purely fictive indicates the instinctive feeling which demands that there is a difference between first and third person forms of narrative.

Cohn's book is neatly divided into two sections dealing firstly with third person and then first person narrative. The concept which appears 'naturally' in James and Lubbock is never seriously questioned by these later critics. The difference is felt to be there. Even Genette who seems to toy with the notion

finally constructs his typology on the basis of this difference despite a more exotic nomenclature. The only two critics who would at all contest this distinction are Stanzel and Lanser, whose work shall be examined more fully later.<sup>10</sup> Stanzel does not actually contest the existence of the category of first person narrative, but refuses to recognise a simple split between first and third person texts, arguing that greater stress must be laid on the concept of 'mediacy' i.e. the way in which the story is told, rather than by whom it is told. Lanser too does not refute the distinctions as such, but the focus of her work lies elsewhere, with the question of narrative authority.

The critics whom we have mentioned approach the area of narrative technique in a variety of different ways which will be examined in due course, but it is significant that for all of them the difference between third and first person is a significant narrative factor; it is somehow natural and its existence is fundamentally unproblematic. The brief survey which we have done, suggests that its significance, however, lies beyond the purely narratological, for the first person referent seems to exceed the ontological status of its text as fiction, and intimates a relationship of the first person pronoun with language which will lead our study beyond the limits of narratological distinctions.

Notes to Introduction

1. Henry James, 'Preface to 'The Ambassadors'', in The Art of the Novel, (New York, 1962) esp. pp.320-321.
2. See chapter 1, pp.19-22.
3. Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, (Chicago, 1961), p.150.
4. Gérard Genette, 'Discours du récit', in Figures III, (Paris, 1972), p.251. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
5. See chapter 1, pp.14-16 and chapter 4, pp.123-129.
6. Kate Hamburger, The Logic of Literature, translated by Marlyn J. Rose, 2nd Rev. ed., (Bloomington, 1973), p.311. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
7. Bertil Romberg, Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First Person Novel, (Stockholm, 1962), p.4. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
8. Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, (London, 1921). References after quotations are given in the text.
9. Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds; Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction, (Princeton, 1978). References after quotations are given in the text.
10. Franz Stanzel, A Theory of Narrative, (Cambridge, 1984). See chapter 1, pp.16-17 and chapter 4, p.129. Susan Sniader Lanser, The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction, (Princeton, 1981). See chapter 1, pp.34-36.

## CHAPTER ONE

## Theoretical Approaches to First Person Narration

Towards the end of The Craft of Fiction, Lubbock writes:

- The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view - the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story. (251)

Lubbock, here, is addressing the question of how information in narrative may be conveyed and the relationship which exists between the narrator and the material which he proposes to relate and which will in due course become his narrative. It is the question of how, in the terms of the Russian formalists, 'fabula' is transformed into 'sjuzet'.<sup>1</sup> Lubbock's panoramic account of narrative technique surveys the various methods by which the story may be transmitted, but he does not provide in any sense a typology of narrative situations nor does he clearly provide tools for distinguishing between different types of 'point of view', for his method is essentially an evaluative one. In order to take our discussion of first person narrative further, it seems necessary at this point to be more accurate in our definition, not only of the concept, but also of the position that it holds in the field of narrative fiction. We shall examine the work of three theorists who do try to establish some

form of typology of narrative situations, not in order to compare the value of their respective work, but in order to clarify for ourselves the object and the limits of our study.<sup>2</sup>

Norman Friedman begins his discussion of the problem by attempting to give a brief history of narrative theory from Plato to the modern age.<sup>3</sup> Like Lubbock, he seems to exhibit a predilection for the Jamesian notions of 'showing' and 'telling', inevitably preferring the former to the latter. He does go further, however, in setting out a range of eight possible means by which the 'problem of the narrator' may be solved. The categories range, on the one hand, from 'editorial omniscience' in which the narrator, an authorial presence, is able to delve into the minds and hearts of all his characters and make show of his knowledge to the reader, to the other extreme, 'the camera', in which knowledge is limited to purely external features of perception, and even authorial selection takes second place to the demands of contingency which shape the narrative. Friedman establishes his schema on the basis of the response to four questions which he feels must be asked in order to define 'point of view'. He asks:

- 1) who talks to the reader? (author in the first or third person, character in first or ostensibly no-one)
- 2) from what position (angle) regarding the story does he tell it? (above, periphery, center, front or shifting)
- 3) what channels of information does the narrator use to convey the story to the reader? (author's words, thoughts, perceptions, feelings; or character's words and actions; or characters thoughts perceptions and feelings: through which

of these or combinations of these three possible media does information regarding mental states, setting, situation, and characters come?)

4) at what distance does he place the reader from the story? (near, far or shifting.). (1168-1169)

The problem with Friedman's criteria is immediately evident from the selection of possible answers which he gives, for it seems impossible to place every possible variation into one of his eight categories. The notion of 'point of view' which can be used so glibly is immediately problematised by the seemingly endless range of possibilities which appear to offer strikingly discordant methods of division and sub-division. It is not that the questions asked by Friedman are irrelevant, but rather that their juxtaposition suggests a plethora of potential contradiction and compromise.

In the eight categories, two are reserved for what we might notionally at this stage classify as first person narration. The two categories are similar to Lubbock's distinction and are where the 'I' is positioned as 'witness', and, secondly, where the 'I' is positioned as protagonist. For both, the stress is placed on the limitations of the narrative information which may be conveyed. Omniscience is surrendered and the narrator has recourse to secondary sources of information for things which may be said to take place outside the orbit of his own experience. The sense of limitation is not confined to what may be known, but also to the problems of logistics. The embodiment of the

narrating voice consequently entails an existential limitation on what the narrator may narrate and the position from which the narrator may speak. Referring to the case of the 'I as protagonist', Friedman states that 'the angle of view is that of a fixed center', locating a strictly defined space for the source of the narrative. Another significant point made by Friedman can be gleaned from the following remark: 'Albeit the narrator is a creation of the author, the latter is from now on denied any direct voice in the proceedings at all'. (1174)

For Friedman, first person narrative signals the eclipse of the 'author' as source, for the source in first person narrative is decidedly located elsewhere. In a sense, he seems to be suggesting that first person narrative is distinctly anti-nouvellesque.

The difficulty with Friedman's work lies not in his project to solve 'the problem of the narrator', but in the multiplicity of issues he attempts to address and then to reduce by means of an over-reductive synthesis. His main achievement is perhaps in highlighting the difficulty inherent in the term 'point of view', and by opening up the area for exploration in addressing issues which unfortunately he cannot fully answer.

As a corrective to the over-synthetic approach of Friedman and the anglo-american tradition, Genette in '*Discours du récit*'



attempts to break the narrative situation down into discrete units which may be analysed and identified separately and further recombined thus escaping the normative categorisation of Friedman's schema. Genette writes:

Une situation narrative comme tout autre est un ensemble complexe dans lequel l'analyse ou simplement la description ne peut distinguer qu'en déchirant un tissu de relations étroites entre l'acte narratif, ses protagonistes, ses déterminations spatio-temporelles, son rapport aux autres situations narratives impliquées dans le même récit etc. (227)

In his study Genette analyses narrative metaphorically in terms of grammatical structure, dividing aspects of narrative formulation into the three broad categories of 'time', 'mood' and 'voice' which correspond generally to aspects of the verb. The temporal aspects of his work do not concern us here, for they are not necessarily characteristic of first person narrative.<sup>4</sup> What do interest us, however, are the categories of 'mood' and 'voice' in which Genette attempts to articulate more precisely the responses to the type of question asked by Friedman by offering a broader range of potential solutions and by allowing them to stand as separate categories. The most crucial distinction made by Genette here is to create a divide in the narrative structure between 'who speaks' i.e. who tells the tale and his relationship to it, analysed under the category of 'voice', and 'who sees' i.e. the means by which information is conveyed at the level of the text. Whereas Friedman had tried to reconcile these factors, Genette explicitly recognises their difference which demands a

separate analysis.

Although Genette departs from previous formulisations of narrative situations, he does nevertheless adhere to the notion that there is a fundamental distinction to be made between first-person/homodiegetic and third-person/heterodiegetic narratives. This view is, however, contested by Stanzel in A Theory of Narrative who disputes this binary distinction as a significant means of classifying narrative, emphasising instead 'mediacy of presentation' as the generic characteristic of narration. The result of this refusal to work with a binary model is the construction of the 'typological circle' which would allow the arrangement of narrative relatively rather than oppositionally. For Stanzel, the narrative can be told primarily in one of three ways: by a first-person narrator, by an authorial presence or by a figural presence. Stanzel seeks to stress the means by which the story is told, the mediacy of narrative presentation. He writes:

Narration can be considered to be effected by two kinds of narrative agents, narrators (in a personalized or unpersonalized role) and reflectors. (48)

What Stanzel means by narration is not solely who speaks but how the narrative is produced. Reflector characters, which may occur in authorial/third person situations and also in first person narratives, serve the function of acting as centres of perception by means of which the narrative is channelled. The reflector is

a centre of consciousness who narrates not in the sense of speaking, but of conditioning and limiting the sphere of that which is spoken about. Stanzel argues that both first person and authorial narrators are to be seen as 'elements of the surface structure of the narrative'. (17) Their existence per se tells us nothing of significance about the narrative. It is only when the narratorial situation is combined with the question of mediacy that a significant statement can be produced.

Stanzel's 'typological circle' thus posits all narrative as part of a continuum of possibility rather than as belonging to a field of difference.<sup>5</sup> His circle stresses similarities between works which merge into each other rather than presenting works as polar opposites. As Dorrit Cohn points out in a critique of the typologies of Genette and Stanzel, the project of Stanzel is to assimilate everything into his typology and by effectively eradicating meaningful differences he can do so.<sup>6</sup> Genette, however, seeks to isolate elements and identify anomalies through the erection of boundaries. Stanzel, like Friedman before him, is aiming at synthesis.

The aim of this brief discussion has been to examine the ways in which first person narrative has been theorised as a narratological concept, or as Stanzel remarks, as an 'element of surface structure'. While we have highlighted differences in the three approaches, we have yet to elucidate James' description of

the technique as being 'the darkest abyss of romance'. Perhaps the problem with this approach is summed up by Lanser who criticises all formalist approaches for their 'concentration on the quantifiable and on binary oppositions..., [their] tendency to grapple primarily with surface structures of the text; adherence to a supposedly value free methodology; and most critically, an isolation of texts from extraliterary contexts and from their ideological base' (39). Her own approach is concerned much more with how 'point of view' functions, the effects which it produces and the analysis of 'the contextual ideological framework of discourse'. She asserts that 'the point of view of the text, along with the text's aesthetic structures...functions somewhat like a metaphor in relation to the underlying systems, and especially (in the case of point of view) to the communicative situation represented by the text. Like the metaphor, the text both conceals and reveals the social reality it encodes' (107).

What we wish to do now is to examine the ideological function of point of view, acknowledging the narratological framework as a means of identifying narrative situations, but taking the concept beyond this in order to probe the meanings which it produces. As a starting point to this discussion, we may look to a remark by Cohn relating to Stanzel's typology. She refutes his attempt to assimilate first and third person narrative into a single continuum stating that 'no text can be

placed on the boundary separating first and third person narration: for the simple reason that the grammatical difference pertaining between persons is not relative but absolute... The boundary between persons is...both real and absolute: no gradation is possible between "I" and "he".<sup>7</sup> Her statement brings us directly to the heart of the issue: what is the nature of this absolute difference between 'I' and 'he' and why does it appear sacrosanct?<sup>8</sup>

It has already been noted that first person narrative has not enjoyed equal fortune throughout the development of the novel genre. The idea of the 'existential link' which certain theorists have ascribed to the first person form is something which may be said to adhere particularly to the novel. Robert Elliot has remarked that, in literature of the medieval period, 'the concept of literary property hardly existed: the audience understood that in writing "I", the poet represented himself not in a personal way, but himself insofar as he represented mankind'.<sup>9</sup> Conversely the notion of personal property is essential to the concept of the existential link, for therein lies the idea that the 'I' belongs to someone who can be identified in terms of his difference from others. It serves as a sign of difference not of generality. The notion of literary person cannot be separated from that of literary property. F W J Hemmings notes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the first person pronoun was used in great abundance as an

authenticating figure in the vogue for the historical and pseudo-historical memoir form.<sup>10</sup> The I as witness served not only to authenticate, but also to counterfeit as its usage constantly challenged the reader to defy its authority. Hemmings writes: 'The reason for the universality of the practice in the Age of Reason, as it was so complacently denominated, was that no story that was not vouched for by a principal participant - active or passive - was thought to warrant belief. There could be no narrative without a narrator' (24).

More than this the narrator had to make himself visible as a source of authority in order to make himself credible. This seems to testify to a relationship between the self and the world which grants primacy to the experiencing I, and displays confidence in the I's conquest of experience. Interesting also is the way in which the pseudo-historical interfered with the historical, merging the difference between fiction and non-fiction on the basis of the properties of the first person. Hemmings notes the demise in the use of the first person during the course of the nineteenth century, the 'Age of Realism', and seems to attribute this to the form's fundamentally unreal qualities, particularly in the accumulation of and accrediting of information which forced personalised narrators into fantastic logistical shifts and farcical manifestations of eavesdropping. Yet as Scholes and Kellogg point out, 'the natural form of mimetic narrative is eyewitness and first person. Circumstantially,

verisimilitude and many more of the qualities which we recognise as identifying characteristics of realism in narrative are all natural functions of the eye-witness point of view' (250).

It is tempting to agree with this latter perspective that the most 'real' narrative mode would be that of the first person account, and, in this light, its eclipse during the nineteenth century is revealing. The Realism, which Hemmings refers to, was concerned less with verisimilitude than with authority and knowledge which would transcend the mere particular. Authority comes from the erasure of the self, the partial and limited point of view and is based on a strategy of concealment in which the text is completed through the omission of a narratorial I. The tale is told without a teller. It is perhaps from this point that we can begin to examine the problematics of first person narrative which seem to be grounded in the apparent antithesis between authority and experience. The dual function taken on by the narrating I as both source of authority and centre of experience confronts two apparently antagonistic modes. First person texts will be seen to enact the duel which takes place in the hollow between narrative authority and autobiographical revelation, challenging and fragmenting both in a constant battle between two opposing modes of discourse. For Hemmings, the objectivity of realism was based on 'a representation... ..undistorted by any subjective or partial vision. The realist must strive to make things clear and see them whole' (12). The

achievement of this must necessarily be effected through the omission of the self in which acknowledgement of subjectivity is exchanged in return for power over the other.

The anomaly created in the fiction by the conflation of the roles of narrator and narrative participant is addressed by Hamburger in The Logic of Literature. She refers to first person narrative as 'a structural alien in the realm of fiction', claiming that 'the origins of first-person narration lie in the structure of autobiographical statement' (311). She goes on: 'it is an innate characteristic of every first-person narrative that it posits itself as non-fiction i.e. as a historical document. And it does this on the basis of its first person properties'. She thus lays stress on the authenticating properties of the first person pronoun, the very existence of which engenders a difference from other works of fiction. The I, she argues, is not oriented towards the recounting of subjective phenomena, but 'like every historical I, is oriented toward the objective truth of the narrated' (313). However, given that first person narrative remains resolutely fictional, the text is directed towards the production of 'objective untruth', for the persona indicated by the I represents at most a surrogate author and an ersatz authority which both conceal and make explicit the fictional authority of all narrative fiction.

The altered relationship between the 'real' author of first



person fiction and his narrator has been commented on by several critics. Friedman writes that 'point of view provides a *modus operandi* for distinguishing the possible degrees of authorial extinction in the narrative act' and that consequently, first person narration represents the most complete form of his extinction.<sup>11</sup> Romberg asserts that the adoption of first person narrative means that 'the author vanishes from the scene', but most explicit and revealing is Rousset who writes that its usage entails '*l'évanouissement de l'auteur, plus exactement des signes de l'auteur dans son texte*'<sup>12</sup>. Within the context of the fiction the authority of the text is itself fictionalised, becoming the focus of a homologous activity which in fact asserts pre-eminence over the authorial situation. First person narrative draws attention to that which third person narrative would conceal i.e. the narrative text as work of language, in language, through the constant reminder of its source as an element of its production. The signs of the author which gather round the omission of the I are supplanted by those of the narrator who usurps the authorial role not solely on account of assuming the fictional authority of the text, but by overtly making present narrative as a fiction making process whose reality resides in its own generation. As Hamburger points out 'the first person perspective is consciously incorporated into the novel as a factor of content' (318).

If we are to pursue our study of first person narrative, it is the relationship between the method as 'surface structure' and

its status as 'a factor of content', which must be tested. The coincidental situation of both narrator and character within the first person pronoun will lead us into an exploration of conflict and contradiction between two antithetical and equally impossible positions. Hamburger's suggestion that first person narrative may be read as a 'feigned-reality statement' can easily be reversed to imply that, in fact, first person narrative is a statement of feigned fictitiousness. This paradox is taken up by Michael Glowinski who asserts that while third-person narration moves forward by means of a 'quasi-objective language' directed outwards to the object, first person narration is determined by the notion of language as a performative strategy.<sup>13</sup> Hence he argues that the very idea of a first person novel foregrounds the presence of two avowedly contradictory realms of discourse. On the one hand, it partakes of the narrative strategies inherent in the authoritative third-person novel while on the other betrays a striving towards the autobiographical modes of writing.

Glowinski draws on the notion of 'formal mimetics' in order to tease out the contradictions of the first person form. Formal mimetics refers to a conscious acknowledgement of other genres which are deliberately worked into the fiction and whose presence is recognised by the reader. Thus, in the case of first person narration, the genres alluded to are autobiographical forms such as the diary, the memoir and the epistle.<sup>14</sup> However, the conflict with the demands of narrative results in a situation of impasse and Glowinski concludes that 'formal mimetics rather

resolves itself into a set of analogies which ought to suggest identity but at the same time attest to the impossibility of achieving identity' (106). Consequently, first person narrative ends up by awkwardly attempting to retain one foot in each camp. In conclusion Glowinski, who had earlier referred to the subversive possibilities of exploiting this contradiction, remarks on the historical stasis of first person narrative, which he feels, is always subject to following the development of narrative in the third person. His argument that the form which we are studying remains in the perpetual shadow of other genres and in particular third person narrative is one which we shall contest. We shall argue that the borrowings suggested by Glowinski may indeed serve a subversive function and that first person narrative should not be viewed as a lesser form.

Glowinski's notion of the necessity of the reader recognising competing genres is a constituent feature of first person narrative. It has been noted already the effect to which this was put in past centuries where writers of fiction deliberately exploited the first person in order to establish a sign of authenticity. The difficulties in distinguishing between a genuine and a fictitious I form the basis of Philippe Lejeune's work on autobiography. In Le pacte autobiographique, Lejeune argues that the only means by which a reader may distinguish between autobiography and first person fiction is by relying on the identity or non-identity of narrator and author.<sup>15</sup> He argues

that there is no grammatical nor structural distinction and that only an extratextual referent can determine the quality of a particular work. If this point is accepted, the possibility of counterfeiting the text is evident. In order to avert the threat of a counterfeit identity, other means must be employed either to assimilate the textual I into that of the author or to distance the I by making it profusely other in the case of first person fiction. All writing which foregrounds the I inevitably foregrounds the question of identity.

The belief in the authenticating power of the fictional I is central to Romberg's study of first person narrative. Romberg insists on viewing this form of fiction as if it were 'real', and his analysis of first person technique is grounded in the notion that in order to 'work', the author of a first person text must fully uphold the 'illusion of reality' which can only be effected through the creation of an authentic authorial double in the figure of the narrator.<sup>16</sup> He writes: 'An investigation of the first person novel must take into consideration how far the author really hides behind his narrator, how credible he succeeds in making the illusion that the narrator is responsible for telling the story' (9). For Romberg, the author must seek to create a homologous authorial structure through the creation of a fictive narratorial personage 'whom the author interposes between himself and the reader and who is given authority for the whole story'. Like Hamburger, Romberg defends the idea that first

person narration must be considered as content, as part of the semantic texture of the narrative, rather than as an aspect of form.

Authority is a critical factor in Romberg's discussion of the first person novel. It is paradoxical however that while in third person narrative, authority is bestowed and consummated through the absence of the teller, in first person narrative authority is dependent on the maintenance of an overtly individualised presence. As his argument develops, however, certain problems are revealed regarding the question of the identifying powers of the I. For Romberg, the whole issue of narratorial authority rests not on the I itself, but on the authenticating documentation which would give it credibility. The narrator must be presented with enough biographical information to establish the illusion of real identity. This presentation must 'be modelled upon the real curriculum vitae, the data-crammed preamble of a biography' (85), for without this, the illusion cannot be maintained. The necessity of biographical detail is, for Romberg, transformed into an evaluative necessity since its absence alters the confines of the illusion upon which his theories are based. If the narrator remains anonymous, he is deprived of the authority which he should wield over his tale, for we no longer know 'who speaks'. The problem of the narrator is thus invested with a much more profound significance than that which is identified within a narratological framework. It

addresses the question of being in language itself.

Unless the I can be identified, the relationship which it instigates between discourse and the world is one which threatens both the identity of the speaking subject and the reality of the object evoked in language. If we do not know who speaks, we cannot rightly establish their point of view, which is located not in them, but in the proliferation of circumstantial detail by which they are identified. This alteration of perspective and refusal to foreclose the circuit of identity through wilful anonymity, for Romberg, disrupts reality's illusion. Reality, thus, can only be conceived of as something which exists wholly outwith the self and which offers the self a position within it, a position which the self must occupy in order to produce significant discourse and signify within discourse. The I who is posited as the source of textual authority is ultimately reduced to the authority of a text through which his authority to speak is articulated. This reversal of authority is not approved of by Romberg.

Romberg's study focuses particularly on the form of first person narrative which takes the form of the fictional memoir, certainly the most common type of first person text in the period on which he concentrates. The most salient feature of this form, as far as the narrator is concerned, is that, on the level of the text, his dual role as narrator and character is split, on

account of the temporal disparity between the now of narration and the then of the narrated. Unlike the narrators of the diary and epistolary forms, who write shortly after events are supposed to have taken place, the gulf created by time delineates a clear distinction between the two *Is*. Narration and experience are not contingent and, by necessity, the memoir novel is dominated by the activity of recollection. A dual perspective is thus an integral feature, for the narrator must inevitably know more than his younger self, and importantly, is sure of how the narrative will end. This is another aspect of the 'fictional paradox' of first person narrative evoked by Glowinski, for in the maintenance of novellistic suspense, the narrator abjures the benefit of his own hindsight. Genette notes:

Le récit à la première personne se prête mieux qu'aucun autre à l'anticipation du fait même de son caractère rétrospectif déclaré, qui autorise le narrateur à des allusions à l'avenir, et particulièrement à sa situation présente, qui fait en quelque sorte partie de son rôle. (106) 17

However, it does not follow that a sliding up and down the temporal scale necessarily takes place, for, as Glowinski suggests, the narrator can adhere more closely to his role of organising the unfolding of the tale than to the effusive communication of information.

The 'epic situation' of the narrator may or may not be represented as a significant feature within the narrative

structure, yet the present position of the narrator is evoked each time that the narrator uses the first person pronoun. It is a constant reminder to the reader, of the text as a linguistic performance. The distance created between the narrating I and the character I establishes a perspective which can be likened to that of a third person narrator and his characters. The temporal gap instigates an otherness which is, on the one hand, bridged by the narrator's superior knowledge, yet which, on the other, signals a dramatic discontinuity in the life of the subject. The subject's self which is such a prominent aspect of the narrative is shown only to be determined long after the event. As Rousset says of the first person memoir form:

On rend compte de soi, de son être le plus intime, mais d'un être qui ne peut devenir objet de compte rendu que s'il s'est éloigné dans le temps: tout ensemble proche et différent, sujet et objet du récit. (91)

We have thus returned to the distinction posited by James that the narrator's position is antithetically that of both subject and object. In the traditional memoir, the gap between subject and object gradually decreases as the narrative progresses until the younger self finally catches up with the older narrator and they merge as one. An effect of closure is consequently induced, and the narrative is seen to consume itself at the moment of this occurrence. An apparent truce is declared between the subject and object positions which would negate the hiatus produced by the discordant text. The fusion suggests a



respite for the self in its strategy to contain the unruly happenings of lived experience in an authoritative account in which the narrator has the final word in the vicissitudes of his past self's confrontation with the world.

The activity of recollection, which is never problematised in the traditional memoir form, is the thread which unifies the past and present. It is and is constitutive of the 'existential link' between the two. Remembering and narrating become a single activity, a synonymous mode of retracing a life. Memory, however, is a feature of the performative nature of narration which is dependent on the moment of the text's articulation. In itself, it is an activity free from internal verification, yet it relies on the authority of the text for its authentication. Employed as a strategy in the text's production, its veracity is a product of the text. In his study, Romberg refuses to address the text which exploits these contradictions and is dismissive of any apparent subversion of the conventions of the memoir form. He seeks to reduplicate in his theorising the nostalgic, comforting aspects of the traditional memoir which allow the unproblematic reproduction of a life in words as a guarantee of the self as a transcendental entity outwith the textual product, declining to engage with the problems of the I constituted by the text's production.

In the concluding chapter of his work, Romberg investigates

the use of the first person narrator in Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet as an example of how the technique is employed in the twentieth century. Darley, the narrator, does not recount his own life, but is an observer of that which happens around him. He differs from the narrator of traditional first person forms in a variety of ways, and it is this variation which disrupts Romberg's theory. Unlike the works previously touched on by Romberg, Durrell's novel is a 'difficult' piece and much of the difficulty is caused by the apparent capriciousness of the technique employed. Romberg writes:

The seemingly very puzzling narrative technique in Durrell's work stands out more distinct and more intelligible against a foil of established features and methods in the first person novel and may thereby also, to a certain extent, serve as a sort of summing up. (277)

The modes of subversion used by Durrell will be highlighted shortly, but first a point must be made with regard to Romberg's critical strategy. A great sense of genre is exhibited by Romberg who appears to value the conventions of the tradition for their own sake and to regard them as somehow self-validating: consequently Durrell's text may be perceived as anomalous.<sup>18</sup> More importantly, however, he seeks to exorcise the problems cast up by Durrell's text by explaining them in terms of their difference to the tradition and by attempting to effect a resolution through closure and a denial of the critical difference.

Unlike the traditional first person text, the Alexandria

Quartet questions certain of the conventions which hitherto had been taken for granted. Emphasis is placed on the epic situation, usually eclipsed by the narrative, in order to demonstrate that narrating is not a simple spontaneous activity, and that it is an activity consumed in time. A narrative is not produced all at once and the shifting perspective of the narrator who changes in time as he writes is reflected. The past, therefore, is seen to be subject to correction, for age alone does not bring certainty. Statements are always open to revision and supplement, for it is acknowledged that the narrating I has a strategy which is not necessarily bent on revealing the truth as historical fact and may be proved a purveyor of falsehood or, at least, guilty of putting forward a partial version. Memory for him is difficult. The past will not be yielded simply as a plot, but is revealed gradually and reticently like the hidden layers of a palimpsest. It is fragmented and discontinuous and may seem more like an imperfect chronicle than a history. Time, which had previously been represented as something stable, continuous and external to the self, is now represented as an internal phenomenon. Romberg writes:

The various chronological planes in the sequence of recollected action are all mixed together to the point of equivalence, or else depicted without regard to or feeling for time and chronology, but only according to the degree of intensity (294).

The notion of life as a learning process in time is thus undermined, for internal demand is seen to be the regulator of temporal significance. Romberg's theory is based on the notion

of the self as a single, unified whole and he is unable to incorporate the threat posed by the destabilising of the I suggested by Durrell's novel. The manner in which Durrell highlights the omissions and silences of the traditional first person novel which refuses to engage with the problematics of narrating is berated by Romberg who dismisses Durrell and with him the majority of modern novelists who abandon 'the devices for securing an illusion of reality'. The illusion of reality is to be bought at the expense of verisimilitude.

Romberg would prefer to regard Durrell's 'abuse' of first person technique as something of a cuckoo in the nest of first person narrative, yet Durrell's approach cannot be considered as a simple anomaly in the context of twentieth century narrative fiction. Romberg regards this technique as one which has largely fallen into abeyance in this century, but patently this is not the case. It is certainly employed differently, but is no less prominent for all that. What we shall seek to do in our study is to highlight this difference and examine the ways in which modern first person texts refute the conditions of meaning proposed by Romberg and other theorists who insist on the unity of the I in first person texts.

Lanser, in her work, rejects a purely formalist notion of point of view, questioning the validity of dividing texts into third and first person categories. She nevertheless seeks to

engage with the question of 'who speaks' but does so in ideological rather than formal terms. Point of view, she argues, must be seen as a relationship constructed by the narrator and his audience which is determined on the basis of the narrator's position within a network of socially determined signifiers. She stresses not only the performative nature of narrative discourse, but also the conditions of that performance. She writes: 'The separation of discourse from its performance is not merely artificial, but impossible; it is tantamount to erasing or distorting the very meaning of the utterance' (75). Her notion that point of view functions like a metaphor which 'conceals and reveals the social reality it encodes' is thus an essential adjunct which allows us to question the ideological conditions favourable to the construction of specific texts. It questions Romberg's preference for first person texts which represent long lives chronologically unfolding as something which is neither natural nor to be esteemed *per se*, and permits an examination of anomalous texts as equally significant forms of discourse.

While broadly agreeing with Lanser's position relating to the ideological nature of our subject matter, we shall nevertheless insist on the disjunction of third and first person forms. Even according to Lanser's own system of evaluation, the 'absent' third person narrator speaks differently to a narrator who is present in the first person. She is much concerned with the value system propagated by narrative which affords authority

to statements seeming to emanate from an (absent) white, heterosexual, middle-aged male. Our purpose is not to contest this in the slightest. Our focus is placed elsewhere, however, on the act of narrating about the self and the means by which the narrating I is represented in and by language i.e. by its performance and by the ways in which its performance is conducted. In order to do so, we need some theory which accounts not only for linguistic performance, but also addresses the position of the subject in language and, for this, we shall turn to the work of Emile Benveniste.

In his work Problèmes de linguistique générale, Benveniste adopts a broadly Lacanian-psychoanalytic perspective in order to develop a theory of language and the functioning of the subject in language.<sup>19</sup> In the chapter, 'L'homme dans le langage', Benveniste begins by asserting a distinction between first and third person forms on the basis of the performative nature of language. He argues that only the first and second person may rightly be referred to as such, for only they are constitutive of the process by which language is enacted. They function primarily at the level of language as event:

Dans les deux premières personnes, il y a à la fois une personne impliquée et un discours sur cette personne. 'Je' désigne celui qui parle et implique en même temps un énoncé sur le compte de 'je': disant 'je', je ne puis ne pas parler de moi. (228)

Thus it can be said that the first person pronoun functions both as an indicator of the producer of language and as an

element of its production. Consequently, because the third person is categorically absent from the performative aspect of language, Benveniste consigns it to the category of 'non-personne', subject to, but not subject in, language. A further difference is posited by Benveniste who notes that whereas 'je' and 'tu' are constituted by language as performance, 'il' has no such identity:

Le 'je' qui énonce, le 'tu' auquel 'je' s'adresse sont chaque fois uniques. Mais il peut-être une infinité de sujets - ou aucun. C'est pourquoi le "je est un autre" de Rimbaud fournit l'expression typique de ce qui est proprement l'aliénation mentale, où le moi est dépossédé de son identité constitutive. (230)

It thus emerges that the performance of language which initially seemed to confer an identity upon the I also marks the instance of its dislocation from itself. The I which speaks, is also spoken about and, consequently, to speak is constantly to enact this process of self estrangement. Benveniste pushes this further when he argues that while the I can be identified as he who speaks, this identity refers only to the duration of its performance and has no other identity outwith that of denoting the speaking subject.

'Je' ne peut être défini qu'en termes de 'locution' non en termes d'objets, comme l'est un signe nominal. 'Je' signifie 'le personne qui énonce la présente instance de discours contenant 'je'. Instance unique par définition et valable seulement dans son unicité. (252)

As has been noted, however, the 'énonciation' is dependent

on a second term for its enactment, the 'tu' which the 'je' addresses. The performance of language calls the other in a bid for recognition which demands acknowledgement of the speaking subject's position. It does not wish to be ignored. As a result 'c'est dans une réalité dialectique englobant les deux termes et les définissant par relation mutuelle qu'on découvre le fondement linguistique de la subjectivité' (260). The 'subject' which Benveniste distinguishes from the 'person' is to be located in the gap between the 'je' and 'tu' as a textured, shifting entity which is determined by position in language and not by 'identity'. It is perhaps possible at this stage to comprehend Romberg's fear of the anonymous first person pronoun, for it eschews the notion of identity by refusing to give up its performance and a dialectical position. It is rejecting a position in language by not allowing its self to be substituted by a reference.

In addition to distinguishing between the categories of 'personne' and 'non-personne', Benveniste also makes a distinction between two different types of language which he labels 'histoire' and 'discours' and which, to some extent, may be seen as corollaries to the category of person. Of the first category, he writes:

L'énonciation historique...caractérise le récit des événements passés. Ces trois termes 'récit', 'événements', 'passés' sont également à souligner. Il s'agit de la présentation des faits survenus à un certain moment du temps sans aucune intervention du locuteur dans le



récit (238).

Benveniste might be offering a description of what is traditionally referred to as third person narrative which is distinguished by the collation of past events by a narrator who remains absent from the narrative. Conversely, 'discours' is that form of language which overtly acknowledges the role of the speaking subject, and the epic situation forms an essential feature of its production. The 'énoncé' plays a secondary role to the 'énonciation' as the autobiographical nature of the language is foregrounded. The two modes of language are also distinguished by a different series of verb tenses. The tenses of 'histoire' (the aorist, imperfect and pluperfect) take their meaning from the time of the énoncé whereas the tenses of 'discours' (the present and perfect) signify on the basis of their relation to the énonciation. In addition, 'histoire' is characterised by the 'absence' of 'shifters', which function as signs of the here and now of the énonciative present and of the presence of the narrator. 'Discours', on the other hand, is constituted by their appearance. 'Histoire' is used to convey the sense of events which have no connection with the site and condition of their representation in language, whereas 'discours' instigates a continued link between the level of énonciation and that of the énoncé. In 'discours', the presence of a speaking subject is central to that which is being recounted.

Benveniste is forced to acknowledge, however, that, on an

empirical level, the two modes intermingle. Theoretically, 'histoire' should exclude absolutely the tenses of discours, but transgression does take place. Of the appearance of the present tense in histoire, Benveniste writes: 'le présent serait nécessairement alors le présent de l'historien mais l'historien ne peut s'historiser sans démentir son dessein' (245). The inclusion of a subjective presence entails the disavowal of the objectivity of historic discourse. This disavowal is, however, then revealed as a feint, for, as Genette remarks, the third person narrator is always at liberty to intervene in his text in the first person. Another obvious site of contradiction emerges in the case of first person narrative, for the narrator casting a retrospective eye over his past naturally (sic) uses the aorist as the basic tense of his narrative. Benveniste himself concedes: 'on peut mettre en fait que quiconque sait écrire et entreprend le récit d'événements passés emploie spontanément l'aoriste comme temps fondamental, qu'il évoque les événements en historien ou qu'il les crée en romancier' (243). The I of the first person narrator is once again positioned in a contradictory situation. Supposedly indexing the speaking subject, I in this instance functions solely on the level of the énoncé as a past event. It partakes of the dominion of the non-personne. As a result of this impasse, the I is obliged to eradicate its self from the order which instigates its subjectivity. The autobiography is enshrined in a linguistic mode which engenders a

life in language only at the expense of the erasure of the speaking subject. First person narrative thus occupies an impossible position within language as it both initiates a dialogue with the other, calling for its recognition on the basis of its discursive properties, and admits recourse to a domaine of past events for its authentication through a medium which radically undercuts its historic propensity.

Benveniste analyses the communicative aspect of language in terms of the analysand's quest for self determination:

Son discours est appel et recours sollicitation parfois véhémente de l'autre à travers le discours où il se pose désespérément, recours souvent mensonger à l'autre pour s'individualiser à ses propres yeux. Du seul fait de l'allocution, celui qui parle de lui-même installe l'autre en soi et par là se saisit lui-même, se confronte, s'instaure tel qu'il aspire à être et finalement s'historise en cette histoire incomplète ou falsifié (77).

Writing the story of the self is an attempt to historicise the self, an enterprise which inevitably brings forth errors of omission, falsification and makes explicit the subject's privation. The urge to historicise demands an actualisation of discourse, but also the location of the speaking subject in a network of positioning in relation to the other. The problem with the traditional memoir form is that it views subjectivity as product rather than as a dialectical process between the self and the other which knows no resolution. Romberg remarks that 'the perfect fictional memoir is that which seeks to reproduce a whole life experienced in recollection and which begins as far back as

the memory can reach - and if possible still earlier' (38). For him, the self as an image of wholeness becomes a metaphor for the authenticating power of language, for it is through language that the 'I' is subject to verification. Absence of verification shatters the 'illusion of reality', and lies which seek to distort the relationship between language and the world are not to be countenanced. For Benveniste, however, distortion is the concomitant result of the self's entry into language. There can be no such thing as a perfect memoir, and if language can be said to generate truth, it is in terms of its production and not of a presumed parallel between word and world.

By means of its production, first person narrative seeks to attain the imaginary wholeness desired by the subject, yet its very structure eludes and refuses such wholeness in its address to the other. Lacan writes:

Ce que je cherche dans la parole, c'est la réponse de l'autre. Ce qui me constitue comme sujet, c'est ma question. Pour me faire reconnaître de l'autre, je ne profère ce qui fut qu'en vue de ce qui sera. Pour le trouver, je l'appelle d'un nom qu'il doit assumer ou refuser pour me répondre.<sup>20</sup>

The subject demands primarily not to communicate with the other, the insistent addressee of the act of language, but to be recognised by the other. The act of language is the symptom of a narcissistic demand which renders satisfaction impossible through its constitution in the place of the Other.

S/ For Lacan, the subject, split through entry into language, seeks to historicise himself in order to find confirmation, not only in the present, but for the future. It is the response of the other which will condition the identity of the subject. Language functions as a gift which is bestowed in order to obtain some purchase from its recipient. Consequently, first person narrative which appears to assert the priority of the self over the other, will be seen to be an entreaty, begging recognition from the other.

The death or erasure of the self which is occasioned through the accession to the symbolic haunts narrative of the first person as the reconstruction of the past is ceded to a desired realization in the future. Lacan continues:

C'est comme désir de mort en effet qu'il [le sujet] s'affirme pour les autres; s'il s'identifie à l'autre, c'est en le figeant en la métamorphose de son image essentielle, et tout être par lui n'est jamais évoqué que parmi les ombres de la mort (205).

In the readings of first person narratives which follow, the spectre of the subject's death will be seen to dominate the quest for identity.

Benveniste's debt to Lacan, will become our debt as we argue that first person narrative can be read as the dramatisation of the subject's entry into language. A narrative, purportedly directed towards the past, will be seen to be compellingly structured around the call to the other and the anticipation of

its response. The question of identity which appears fundamental to any theory of first person narrative is one which will be determined by the desired relation between the subject in language and the other, a relation which reveals the inherent narcissism of the self's desire and the fatal priority of the other in its constitution.

In this chapter, we examined various theories of first person narrative before arriving at this conclusion which will prove the starting point for our study. Rather than attempting to erect a typology of first person narrative, we shall endeavour, in the chapters which follow, to explore the ways in which the first person narrator confronts the other in his desire for self-affirmation and to consider the status of first person narrative to be a strategy of failed communication.

As a basis for our study we shall call on the theoretical framework of Benveniste to examine texts written in the first person which underline the paradox of first person narrative and undermine the notion of a 'perfect fictional memoir'. We shall consider first person narrative to be something of a mixed form, a 'structural alien' on account of the merging of the modes of 'discourse' and of 'histoire'. First person narrative will be studied as something other than purely a narratological feature, as a mode of narration which enacts the adventure of the self in language. The texts which we shall examine all betray this

duality which might be interpreted as representing the struggle by the self for recognition from the Other. Consequently, texts such as Pirandello's Uno nessuno e centomila and Volponi's La macchina mondiale, which demonstrate an absolute dislocation between the self and the other, will not be considered.<sup>21</sup> Such texts offer perhaps valuable insights into the problem, but they are monologues rather than narratives which turn completely inwards on a psyche apparently in disfunction. They represent a stage of language in which the other is no longer addressed, and in which the I is the sole point of reference.

We shall begin by discussing Nievo's Le confessioni di un italiano, a mammoth work of nineteenth century prose which details the life of a narrator in history.<sup>22</sup> This text will be considered as a paradigm of traditional first person narrative in which an elderly narrator casts a retrospective glance on to the experiences which constitute his life. The relationship between the 'I' and history will be foregrounded as well as the examination of experienced temporality, memory, identity and the mode of narration. We shall consider the manner in which these features combine in order to produce the notion of a unified self, a notion, as we shall see, that is challenged by the text itself.

Subsequently, we shall tackle the problems of identity in Pavese's La luna e i falò and Bassani's Il giardino dei Finzi-

Contini.<sup>23</sup> In the first of these texts we shall focus particularly on the function of the narrator's name within narrative and also on the activity of memory, two features which have been viewed as representing constants which anchor the I to the notion of its self as a unified whole. In Bassani's novel, we look at the ways in which being is constructed as a textual identity and the ways in which this is subject to alteration which lies beyond the control of the narrator. Both these texts challenge the traditional concept of first person narrative by problematising and destabilising the I as the centre of experience.

Our discussion will then lead on to broach the question of first person narrative in fantastic literature. We shall examine Calvino's trilogy, I nostri antenati, and attempt to engage with the meaning of first person narration where the narrative has no acknowledged external referent.<sup>24</sup> This will cause us in turn to examine more closely the activity of narration itself as a meaningful, existential activity and, consequently, our attention will turn to two of Calvino's later texts Il castello dei destini incrociati and Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore.<sup>25</sup> In these texts narration becomes its own justification, but, unlike the texts of Pirandello and Volponi, it remains other directed, retaining the status of a significant performative strategy while questioning the notion of self-representation in narrative.



Finally our study will conclude by examining Sciascia's Todo modo and Eco's Il nome della rosa.<sup>26</sup> These texts both seek to overcome the anxiety expressed by the other texts in our study with regard to writing the self, by adopting strategies which seek to impose the I onto language without demanding recourse to the authenticating ploys of earlier example of the genre.

In a sense our purpose is in an elucidation of Henry James's definition of first person narrative. We do not seek to interpret what he meant, but to suggest a possible reading of our own as an insight into the 'darkest abyss of romance'.

### Notes to Chapter 1

1. These terms suggests particularly the temporal dimension of narrative. Lubbock would also include aspects of cognition.
2. For a relatively brief but wide-ranging survey of theories of first-person narrative see Nomi Tamir, 'Personal Narrative and its Linguistic Foundation', *PTL* 1, (1976), 403-429.
3. Norman Friedman, 'Point of View in Fiction: the development of a critical concept', *PMLA*, 70 (1955), 1160-1184. A revised form of the article appears in Norman Friedman, Form and Meaning in Fiction, (Athens, Georgia, 1975), pp.134-166. All references given after quotations refer to the original article.
4. For a full discussion of the question of temporality in first person narrative making use of Genette's typology, see Ulla Musarra Schrøder, Le Roman-mémoires modernes, (Amsterdam, 1981).
5. See Stanzel, A Theory of Narrative, p.xvi, for an illustration of the circle which positions a multitude of texts according to the form of their mediacy.
6. Dorrit Cohn, 'The Encirclement of Narrative', Poetics Today 2:2 (1981) 157-182.
7. Cohn, 'The Encirclement of Narrative', p.168.
8. While Genette in 'Discours du récit' accepts an absolute distinction between hetero- and homodiegetic narration, he later tends to agree with Stanzel's thesis that the distinction can on occasions blur. See Gérard Genette, Nouveau discours du récit, (Paris, 1983) pp.70-71.
9. Robert C. Elliot, The Literary Persona, (Chicago & London, 1982), p.5. For a brief discussion of the antecedents of first person narrative and its development see Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog, The Nature of Narrative, (Oxford, 1966) pp.72-79. Also Romberg, pp.311-319.
10. The Age of Realism, edited by F.W.J. Hemmings, (Sussex, 1978) pp.20-21. Further references appear after quotations in the text.
11. Friedman, (1955), p.1163.
12. Jean Rousset, Narcisse romancier, (Paris, 1973), p.103.

13. Michael Glowinski, 'On the first person novel', New Literary History vol.IX, (1977), 103-114.
14. For a discussion of the relationship between first person narrative and 'genuine' autobiographical forms see Philippe Lejeune, Le pacte autobiographique, (Paris, 1975), pp.13-46.
15. Rousset also argues that there is no structural difference between first person narrative and autobiography. More recently this has been contested by Pascal A. Ifri, 'Focalisations et récits autobiographiques', Poétique 72, (1987) 483-495. For a critique of Lejeune's basic premise see Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', MLN, 94 (1979), 919-930 (pp.922-923).
16. The demands placed by Romberg on first person narrative are similar to those of Elizabeth Bruss writing on autobiography. Both stress the need for authorial honesty and veracity, highlighting also the value of information which is verifiable. See Elizabeth W. Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre, (Baltimore and London, 1976) pp.10-11.
17. The same point is noted by Cohn who writes: 'the experiencing self in first person narration...is always viewed by a narrator who knows what happened to him next, and who is free to slide up and down the time axis that connects his two selves'. Cohn, Transparent Minds, p.145.
18. Unlike Romberg, Bruss is acutely aware of the 'institutional' aspects of autobiography as a concept. She writes: 'as one act among all those that human beings might want to undertake through their language and their literature, autobiography could simply become obsolete if its defining features, such as individual identity, cease to be important for a particular culture' (p.15). Romberg seems unaware that his definitions are without universal validity.
19. Emile Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale, (Paris, 1966). References appear after quotations in the text.
20. Jacques Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse', Ecrits I, (Paris, 1966) 111-208, (p.181). Further references appear after quotations.
21. Luigi Pirandello, Uno nessuno e centomila, (Milan, 1926). Paolo Volponi, La macchina mondiale, (Milan, 1965).
22. Ippolito Nievo, Le confessioni di un italiano, third edition, 2 vols., (Milan, 1972).

23. Cesare Pavese, La luna e i falò, ninth edition, (Nuovi Coralli, Turin, 1984). Giorgio Bassani, Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini, (Mondadori, Milan, 1976).
24. Italo Calvino, I nostri antenati, (Einaudi, Turin, 1960).
25. Italo Calvino, Il castello dei destini incrociati, (Einaudi, Turin, 1973), and Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore, (Einaudi, Turin, 1979).
26. Leonardo Sciascia, Todo modo, (Nuovi Coralli, Turin, 1976). Umberto Eco, Il nome della rosa, (Bompiani, Milan, 1980).

All references are to the editions cited above.

## CHAPTER TWO

## The Nineteenth-Century Paradigm

It may be argued that the opening paragraph of Nievo's Le confessioni di un italiano stands as a highly condensed résumé of the entire work. The narrative begins:

Io nacqui veneziano ai 18 ottobre del 1775, giorno dell'evangelista san Luca: e morirò per la grazia di Dio quando lo vorrà quella Provvidenza che governa misteriosamente il mondo (3).

The first person narrator of Le confessioni goes on to tell of the upheavals which he has witnessed as Venice loses its autonomous status and becomes part of the new Italian republic during the course of the eighty years of his life. His fate as an individual is indissociably linked to the fortunes of the nation, and his transformation from Venetian to Italian will be understood as a metaphor for the transformations of the century. In this opening sentence, the changing socio-political status of the narrator is related to the desire to encompass the totality of the life experience. Dorrit Cohn has written that 'infancy and death point up the most obvious limitations imposed on self-narration by the figural identity of hero and historian', and Nievo's text seems, from the very outset, intent on appropriating the entire range of possibilities offered to the 'hero/historian'.<sup>1</sup> The limitations alluded to by Cohn serve also



to remind us of the demands which verisimilitude places on first person narrative. In the course of his eighty years, the narrator may well witness many things which he will wish to relate, yet these eighty years map out the boundaries of the narrator's possible discourse. The narrator can only tell of that which he witnessed himself, but the problems which this creates and the narrative solutions which this imposes will test the notion of verisimilitude to breaking point: the effects of this will be examined later.

The third structural aspect of the narrative introduced here is the role of God or Providence in the narrator's life. At this point, the narrator's attitude seems to be one of passivity in yielding to the deity which mysteriously regulates existence, but the narrative will reveal that his attitude is, in fact, more complex. We will, therefore, begin our study of the novel by examining the role of history in the structuring of his life story before going on to discuss the notion of a life in time, for as Cortini points out in her work on Le confessioni, 'uno dei più profondi significati del romanzo...non è solo l'immagine di un viaggio attraverso la storia, ma anche del viaggio attraverso la vita'.<sup>2</sup> Nievo's text gives a thorough account of the significance of the dual function of the narrator's position as both 'hero and historian' and makes plain the field of tension which both unites and divides the two.

As has been noted, the narrator's life covers the final years of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, a period filled with turmoil in the history of the peninsula. The events of the era figure large within the narrative and famous names of the period co-exist, more or less happily, alongside the purely fictitious characters of the novel. The novel has very much the flavour of a romance. As a historian, however, the narrator does not relate events solely from an academic point of view, but as someone who actively participated in them. The narrator met Napoleon, engaged in militant action with Foscolo, fought in the battles whose outcome was to forge the identity of the nascent nation and suffered and enjoyed the vicissitudes of the last days of Venetian autonomy. Only vaguely aware of that which is taking place elsewhere in Europe, the narrator's experience of history is that of an active participant and observer.<sup>3</sup> Despite a brief moment of glory as he quells his rioting 'compaesani', his life is not crowned with success and his memoir is not to commemorate the life of a great man. The significance of his life, however, lies in the fact that he was a witness to great change. He writes that the only value which may be attributed to his life is that it spanned an era of great import for Italy and that, consequently, his life may be regarded as 'typical' in being representative of his time. He writes:

L'esposizione de' casi miei sarà quasi un  
 esemplare di quelle innumerevoli sorti  
 individuali che dallo sfasciarsi dei vecchi  
 ordinamenti politici al raffazzonarsi dei

presenti composero la gran sorte nazionale italiana (4).

Consequently, the life of the individual is posited as being a direct product of historical circumstance. Later he notes that 'l'uomo è così legato al secolo in cui vive che non può dichiarare l'animo suo senza riveder le buccie anche alla generazione che lo circonda' (180). The bringing together of history and the self in this manner suggests a self which is subordinate to that which lies outside it and declines the notion of a transcendent subject. This concept of the narrator as 'typical' raises too the question of agency. The narrator is certainly a participant in history in that he participates enthusiastically in the events of his time, but it is less certain the degree to which he can be said to influence history or exercise control over the events in which he takes part.

Towards the end of his narrative, the narrator reiterates this point, stating that 'altro non è la vita del popolo se non la somma delle vite individuali' (774). This remark, while underlining the 'typicality' of the individual experience, proposes nevertheless an individual contribution to history which is reminiscent of the narrator's comments on the decline of the Venetian state.<sup>4</sup> It might be contended, therefore, that in some way the individual does determine the course of history through his actions, yet the transcendent term in the debate, at this stage, must remain history rather than the self. At one point, the narrator invokes 'la Musa imparziale della storia'



(228) which seems to confirm the notion of History as a free-ranging independent force external to the will of man, suggested also by the idea of historical progression intimated in the novel's opening paragraph by the transformation from 'veneziano' to 'italiano'. We shall return later to examine further the question of the subject in history after considering the narrator's 'viaggio attraverso la vita' in order to discover whether or not there might be a private space reserved for the self, free from the intervention of circumstance.

Perhaps the most salient feature of the narrator's life has already been alluded to, in that he writes essentially as a witness to great events, without having any claim to greatness himself. As he sets out to retell his life, he lays great stress on the fact that he is 'vecchio e non letterato', and the preface to his autobiography reads almost like an apology. He writes:

Ma già la chiarezza delle idee, la semplicità dei sentimenti, e la verità della storia mi saranno scusa e più ancora supplemento alla mancanza di retorica: la simpatia de buoni lettori mi terrà vece di gloria (5).

The alleged simplicity of his life story written 'alla buona' parallels the simplicity of the man himself. From his humble beginnings in the kitchen at Fratta to the high offices bestowed upon him in Venice after the return of his father, the narrator seeks to retain a large portion of common sense, and on the rare occasions when he does transgress, his elder self gently

corrects the follies of youth. The function of the narrator's simplicity is noted by Cortini:

La mediocrità intende essere, infatti, un  
supporto al valore testimoniale,  
dell'esperienza di un uomo come tanti altri  
che, come o più di altri, ha avuto la ventura  
(non il merito) di un percorso biografico  
d'eccezione (53).

The value of this is thus evident, in that it seeks to guarantee the honesty and truth of the narrator's representation of the world. Similarly, the narrator indicates that what he relates will be afforded authority by virtue of being told by 'la voce d'un ottuagenario'. However, the authority granted to old age and simplicity are posited as givens of the text. The narrator, as he surveys the landscape of his past, is already in a position of authority and the tale which will unfold can be read as the story of how he came to reach an authoritative position. The implication is, clearly, that life, like history, is experienced as a progression or as a learning experience in time.

In terms of the narrative, therefore, the relationship between the narrating I and the narrated I is one which is dominated by the former who does enjoy the benefit of hindsight. He is a self who has learned, and although the gap between the two selves gradually closes as the time between the narration and the narrated events gradually decreases, it can never be sealed completely even if the narrator continues until the moment of his death.

The need for authenticity in Le confessioni, a feature reckoned to be central to all first person narrative, is compounded by the fact that although the narrator may himself be very ordinary, he does not lead an ordinary life. Giovanni Carsaniga notes:

Narrative truth...emerged for Nievo out of a rendering of the whole of human experience, individual, social, economic, political, set against a vast fresco of Italian history extending from the end of the eighteenth century down to his own time. <sup>5</sup>

It seems, therefore, that in order to contain such a vast range of concerns within a single text or single life span, Nievo requires a narrator who not only is very old, but who also has enjoyed almost miraculous changes in fortune and a startling ubiquity of movement. The inverisimilar nature of such shifts must be compensated for, not only by a trustworthy narrator, but by one who is aware of the exceptional circumstances in which his life has taken place. In this context, it should also be noted that the historic events and famous historical figures which populate the novel serve to authenticate the narrator's memoir. The truth of their existence spills over onto the narrator's text in order to add credence to his account, but as we shall later see, the narrator's fictional existence also contaminates the veracity of historical fact.

Although the narrator is identified primarily as a witness to history, there exists another, deeper level on which his identity is constructed. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator introduces the reader to his earlier life in the castle at Fratta and to the people who shared this dimension. He remains peculiarly silent about his origins, however, revealing only his first name, but giving no further information regarding who he is. Significantly, he begins the second chapter:

Il maggior effetto prodotto nei lettori del capitolo primo sarà stata la curiosità di saper finalmente, chi fosse questo Carlino. Fu infatti un gran miracolo il mio od una giunteria solenne di menarvi a zonzio per un intero capitolo della mia vita, parlandovi sempre di me, senza dir prima chi io mi sia.(49)

The withholding of substantial information regarding his own identity is recognised by the narrator as a significant omission. On the one hand, it may be interpreted as a tantalising narrative ploy, but, perhaps more importantly, suggests that despite the truth bearing strategies of the opening chapter, the narrator's discourse somehow verged on the meaningless, due to the lack of an external (albeit fictional) referent on which to situate the anonymity of the narrator's I. In the second chapter, Carlino is rather more fulsome in documenting information which might give the reader a more detailed record of his identity, but he has, at the same time, established a structure through which identity will be periodically revealed in the course of the novel.

The idea of revelation might seem to run counter to what we had already noted regarding life as a gradual learning experience, for this earlier notion indicates that the securing of an identity is one based on maturity and the accumulation of a totality. It must, however, be recognised that an antithetical structure is also in operation. Carlino's identity shifts as the network of his family relationships is uncovered, altering radically his social and affective situation in a manner which could not have been predicted. The result of these shifts is, on the one hand, to allow Carlino access to a much wider variety of social situations, but, on the other, it questions the notion of an inherent, permanent and unified identity. Identity comes to be seen as something which depends upon the other and its manifold manifestations are best seen as alterations or fragmentations in the self's relationship with the other. If the narrator's identity can be said to parallel the chronological unfolding of history on one level, it can also be argued that his identity within the family causes his experience to be layered into larger blocks of time. The prime example of this is his change in status subsequent to the return of his father, but other significant shifts occur whenever a family tie is exposed. The sense of identity constructed here has little to do with linear temporal progression, for its development is unpredictable and sporadic. The constant revision of the self which such revelations betoken, necessitates the finding of a common thread which will join together the various, divergent points on the

continuum of life. It is these supports which we will now examine.

In a life as varied and momentous as that of Carlo Altoviti, the main link between past and present selves is constructed through the narrator's ability to span the decades of his life through the act of memory. In retrospective first person narration, the ability of the narrator to remember is the fundamental structuring device of the text, although there is no obligation on the part of the narrator to draw attention to this act nor to the hazards which such a performance might involve. In Le confessioni, however, the narrator does make explicit reference to the fact that his narrative is an act of memory, recognising this as an important feature of his life and work.

One of the principal functions of the narrator's memory is to guarantee the veracity of his narrative. Towards the beginning of his story, he remarks with reference to the great upheavals of the past:

Leggere al giorno d'oggi di cotali ordinamenti politici e militari che somigliano buffonerie, parrà forse una gran meraviglia. Ma le cose camminavano appunto com'io le racconto. (18)

The significance of the verb 'raccontare' may be gleaned, if we note the narrator's later reminder to the reader, which serves also as an admonishment: 'io racconto e non invento' (773).

Carlo is telling, but he clearly believes that what he is telling

is the truth and not a fiction invented by him. He takes great pains to underline the veracity of his narrative, abandoning the focus on his past self in order to address the reader directly:

ma ve lo giuro una volta per sempre: io non vi  
ricamo di mio capo un romanzo: vo semplicemente  
riandando la mia vita. Ricordo a voce alta; e  
scrivo quello che ricordo. Scommetto anzi che  
se tutti vorrete tornar daccapo colla memoria  
aglianni della puerizia, molti fra voi  
troveranno inessi i germi e quasi il compendio  
delle passioniche poscia inorgoglirono (200).

Carlo, in denying that he is composing a novel, appears to substantiate his claim by subordinating the written dimension of his narrative, not only to memory, but to memory activated orally.<sup>6</sup> Orality takes precedence over the written text which is posited as a mere transcription or supplement to the genuine performance of narration which is spoken out loud. This seems to coincide with Carlo's earlier claims regarding the absence of rhetoric in his narrative, suggesting that the spoken language, being somehow spontaneous and devoid of artifice, bears a truth which is distorted and confused by the written text. He does not question, however, the enormity of his mnemonic capacity in recalling events, however formative, from his earliest childhood. The suggestion, too, that the tribulations of childhood may be read as a key to the later development of the self, seems to contradict the idea of the self growing and progressing in time, although it could also be contended that the maturity of the self lies in its being able to recognise itself across the span of time.



The linking of memory and its oral source is, nevertheless, contradicted elsewhere by the narrator. He writes of waking one day to find that 'le memorie del giorno prima mi passarono inanzi chiare ordinate e vivaci come i capitoli d'un bel romanzo'(125). More significantly, however, he had previously noted:

Per me la memoria fu sempre un libro, e gli oggetti che la richiamano a certi tratti de' suoi annali mi somigliano quei nastri che si mettono nel libro alle pagine più interessanti. Essi ti cascano sott'occhio di subito; e senza sfogliazzar le carte, per trovare quel punto del racconto o quella sentenza che ti ha meglio colpito, non hai che a fidarti di loro (122).

This passage suggests immediately that, through memory, the past is easily recuperable, and also that it is fixed there, to be inspected at will from an unchanging perspective. The implication is too that the book itself is a transparent medium, serving only as a vehicle through which the past can be brought back to life. The book is a true representation of the past and reading is an unproblematic activity.

That life is also experienced as a book is indicated by the narrator when he asks:

Ma chi si dava cura di tener dietro alle passioncelle e ai romanzi della nostra adolescenza? - Ci giudicavamo novelli affatto nella vita, che ne avevamo già fornita tutta l'orditura; e il compiere la trama è opera manuale alla quale siamo sospinti il più delle volte da forza ineluttabile e fatale (290).



His fatalistic response betrays an anxiety which is more clearly expressed later when he addresses the reader thus:

io vi posso assicurare che quel personaggio  
(Saffo) non è una grottesca finzione poetica,  
ma ch'esso ha vissuto in carne ed ossa, come  
appunto viviamo io e voi (591).

The uneasy juxtaposition of fictional and real figures blurs the distinctions between the two as both become textualised on the same level. The device of addressing the other, coupled with the narrator's claims of orality, indicate the distress of the narrator as he seeks to secure an identity through the evocation of his past and expresses a desire for recognition which would secure also an identity in the present. Memory, although directed towards the past is, nevertheless, an activity in the present and an activity which seeks satisfaction in the present.<sup>7</sup> While the narrator has implied that his memory is capable of encompassing the totality of his past, it is possible to detect breaches in this. In another aside which breaks from the focus onto the past, he laments:

Ad ottant'anni dura ancora il rammarico di non  
poter contemplare nel memore pensiero  
l'immagine della madre. Le labbra che non  
ricordano il sapore de' suoi baci inardiscono  
più presto al fiato maligno dell'aria mondana  
(534-535).

His memory is thus imperfect for it cannot restore his most fundamental desire of all, that of the primary recognition of his

self by the other. Whereas La Pisana's lock of hair can help him recall his relationship with her, and his other mementos bring back other periods of his life, they serve ultimately only to underline the absence of the desired object in the present. Consequently, memory is not restorative, for although it may enable the narrator to commemorate moments from the past, it cannot console him for their loss. In his eulogy to memory, he writes:

Memoria, memoria, che sei tu mai! Tormento,  
 ristoro e tirannia nostra, tu divorì i nostri  
 giorni ora per ora minuto per minuto e ce li  
 rendì poi rinchiusi in un punto, come in un  
 simbolo dell'eternità! Tutto ci togli, tutto  
 ci ridoni; tutto distruggi, tutto conservi;  
 parli di morte ai vivi e di vita ai  
 sepolti!....Ma la mia memoria frattanto mi  
 servì assai male; essa mi legò giovane ed uomo  
 ai capricci d'una passione fanciullesca. La  
 perdono tuttavia; perché val meglio a mio  
 giudizio il ricordar troppo e dolersene, che il  
 dimenticar tutto per godere. (318)

This lengthy quotation demonstrates all of the narrator's ambivalence towards a memory which has the dual function of both evoking the past and reminding him, in the present, of his loss. Concluding that he prefers the pain of the acknowledged loss to a blissful ignorance, is the only means by which the narrator can ensure any degree of continuity between his past and present selves. The text which he speaks and then writes, functions as a metaphor for the illusory hold which the narrator has on the past.

At this point in his narrative where Carlo laments the

passing of his youth, he expresses disbelief and intense grief that all that he has experienced will end in nothingness. He asks: 'oh come mai avrà a finire in nulla un tesoro di affetti e di pensieri che sempre s'accumula e cresce?' (477). He goes on to say that 'il tempo non è tempo ma eternità, per chi si sente immortale', revealing the manner in which he has become trapped between the feelings of immortality associated with his youth and the present recognition of his impending death. Through memory, the narrator seeks to immobilise his past by means of his narrative in an attempt to become his own measure of time. The narrator no longer feels immortal, hence the recourse to narrative which imposes its own time on the past which he has accumulated, but which threatens to dissolve. Later the narrator refers to his memory as a 'reliquiario', suggesting his veneration of an object already dead. His position lies somewhere between those of Lucilio and Clara, the former claiming that memory is a 'sepolcro', while the latter stating that 'la memoria è un tempio, un altare' (192). Whereas Lucilio is ready to regard the past as dead and buried, and Clara worships the past in nostalgic fervour, the attitude of the narrator is more complex. As ever in Le confessioni, the narrator seeks to find parallels between the life of the individual and the life of the nation. Just as the self has tokens which remind of the past so too does the state:

Il fatto si è che quei simboli del passato sono  
nella memoria di un uomo, quello che i  
monumenti cittadini e nazionali nella memoria  
dei posteri. Ricordano, celebrano,

ricompensano, infiammano.... Un popolo che ha grandi monumenti onde ispirarsi non morrà mai del tutto, e moribondo sorgerà a vita più colma e vigorosa che mai... (123).

The monuments of the past have, therefore, a symbolic value pointing towards the future, with which a symbolic identity may be constructed. This does, however, necessitate a dislocation with the real which the narrator seems to wish to retrieve by means of his private memory. The identity, which he constructs by means of the mnemonic activity of writing, is therefore idealised in the sense that it is partial and can only substitute that which was experienced. The problem for the narrator is, as he notes, that 'vi sono momenti che la memoria sente ancora e sentirà sempre quasiché fossero eterni, ma non può né esaminarli, né descriverli' (751). The gap between experience and narrative is caused by the fact that while life may be beyond language, it can only be expressed by it. Memory can only be activated as a linguistic, hence symbolic activity, in order to achieve recognition by the other. If the narrator is to have an identity at all, he must submit to these demands of imperfection and concede specificity to typicality.

Despite the narrator's repeated disavowals, he cannot escape the fact that he is presenting the reader with a literary text. The elements of 'discours' which punctuate the 'histoire' draw attention to the artifice of the construct even when they do not make direct reference to the literary experience. The purpose of

such 'digressions' is always to instigate a direct rapport with the reader, the other to whom Carlo directs his address. Such digressions, he feels, are an inevitable part of the autobiographical mode. He writes:

Pur troppo in chi racconta la propria vita  
s'hanno a compaire sovente di cotali  
digressioni. Io poi per tirar innanzi ho  
proprio bisogno della vostra generosità, o  
amici lettori (401).

As well as establishing contact with his readership, the narrator also demonstrates an awareness of his place in a literary tradition. In the course of his narrative, he alludes to the great works of Italian literature, which as an uncultured reader he could not fully appreciate, but which he recognises as an essential feature in the forging of a unified, Italian identity.<sup>8</sup> Democratic like the times, he calls for a greater clarity of expression and a return to a form of writing which would more closely resemble everyday speech. The aim of such a project would be to aid the development of a national consciousness which could sustain the political changes which Italy has seen. Earlier he had written: 'io scrivo per dire la verità, e non per dilettae la gente, con fantasie prettamente poetiche' (48). His task is not only to record his life for its own sake, but to offer it as an example to future Italians.

The narrator is, however, aware of his role in the internal organising of his narrative as its author.<sup>9</sup> Apart from

maintaining the gap between his present and past selves with his 'senno di poi', he also playfully refers to the circumstances of his own act of writing. Perhaps the most notable example of this occurs at the end of chapter 14 and the beginning of chapter 15. He concludes the former chapter, writing: 'ma sono stanco di scrivere, e voglio chiudere il capitolo lasciandovi nell'incertezza di quello che ne avvenne poi' (580). He begins the next chapter by excusing himself and explaining that he had got into the habit of writing a chapter per day, carrying on until sleep had overtaken him. Each chapter can no longer be conceived of as a natural segment of the narrator's life, for its duration depends not on its own realisation, but on the material conditions which determine its writing. Carlo's life may seem episodic as he hurtles from one adventure to another, but, it is revealed, so is the writing of it.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator's introduction, which also functions as an epilogue, reveals that the narrative has, in fact, been nine years in the writing. A large portion of the narrator's life has, therefore, been turned over to the task of its transcription, yet this information is glimpsed only on the margins of the text. Part of the fiction of first person narrative is that life and the act of narrating are mutually exclusive events. In terms of sheer duration, narration must be regarded as a significant biographical fact, yet its significance is eclipsed by its own production. Even the elements of

'discours' which overtly reveal the performative nature of narration, consume themselves at the moment of their enactment as they are transformed into plot. The present of narration which is the moment of the narrative's generation is extinguished by the temporality it engenders through its linguistic strategies. The past which is represented through history, as experience and by memory, is formed at the expense of the present. The narrator's determination to construct a personal myth in terms of an historical identity can only achieve satisfaction through the eclipse of subjectivity.

If, on one level, Carlo's narrative can be read as a celebration or commemoration of a momentous epoch and the rise of a unified Italian state, its significance on a personal level may be seen to lie elsewhere. As Cortini pointed out, Le confessioni detail also Carlo's journey through life and it is at the point of the narrator's death that the memoir is written. Carlo remarks:

Gli è della storia della mia vita, come di tutte le altre, credo. Essa si diparte solitaria da una cuna per frapporsi poi e divagare e confondersi coll'infinita moltitudine delle umane vicende, e tornar solitaria e sol ricca di dolori e di rimembranze verso la pace del sepolcro (180).

In his present isolation, the narrator is forced to contemplate his own death and, in a sense, the writing of his life is an attempt to ward off his imminent departure. On two occasions, he refers to his confessions as an epitaph both to his life and

times but no amount of words will do to prevent the inevitable end.<sup>10</sup> The gap between writing and living is noted by Carlo who comments on the rapidity of passing time compared to the apparent stasis of narration:

A questo modo passano rapidi gli anni come i mesi della giovinezza; ma non crediate che in effetto fossero tanto veloci come sembra a raccontarli. Più il tempo è lungo a narrarlo e più forse fugge rapidamente in realtà (778).

Carlo's experience of time is various as the relatively brief account of his years of marriage shows, if compared to the lengthier analyses of his more active earlier life. However, just as the diary of Giulio, his dead son, cannot repair Carlo's loss, the narrator's own text serves only to highlight the inevitability of his own death. If his aim is to prolong his life through writing, the narrator's ploy ultimately fails.

In his 'proemio', Carlo refers to 'la pace dell'animo' as the only fruit he has gathered from life. He continues:

La pace di cui godo ora, è come quel golfo misterioso in fondo al quale l'ardito navigatore trova un passaggio per l'oceano infinitamente calmo dell'eternità. Ma il pensiero, prima di tuffarsi in quel tempo che non avrà più differenza di tempi, si slancia ancora una volta nel futuro degli uomini, e ad essi si lega fidente le proprie colpe da espiare, le proprie speranze da raccogliere, i propri voti da compiere (6).

The interesting feature of Carlo's narrative, as he teeters on the brink of death, is the extent to which it remains directed towards the future. The evocation of the past is never undertaken solely for its own sake, but is used to instruct the



reader of the manner in which the narrator grew in time. The eulogistic aspects of his retelling of the past never fully obscure the desire also to move on. Thus, the narrator's early years in the kitchen of Fratta serve, on the one hand, as the focus of nostalgic return, but also as the point from which the narrator can re-enact his entry into the outside world.

The narrator's most urgent call to the other is, however, felt in the final pages of the novel. We noted in the opening lines of the novel the fact that Carlo appears to place his trust in God and throughout his autobiography, faith and justice are deemed to occupy a significant role in his journey through life. Early in the novel, the narrator breaks off from his narrative in order to give the reader an insight into one of the lessons he has learned from his experience:

Dopo molti anni strappai al mio cuore un brano sanguinoso sul quale era scritto giustizia, e conobbi che la vita umana è un ministero di giustizia, e l'uomo un sacerdote di essa, e la storia un'espatriatrice che ne registra i sacrifici a vantaggio dell'umanità che sempre cangia e sempre vive(78).

Despite the religious imagery, Carlo's message is undoubtedly secular. The hallowed concepts of faith and justice are located not in God, but in man. Although he professes a belief in the role of Providence, he is, nevertheless, a materialist at heart. Towards the end of his narrative and hence of his life, he addresses once more the reader:

Vi sarete accorti che di tutte le professioni  
cui io mi dedicai, a nessuna mi avea condotto  
il mio libero arbitrio; e che o la volontà  
degli altri, o la necessità del momento, o un  
concorso straordinario di circostanze m'aveano  
dato in mano il partito bell'e fatto senza che  
io potessi pur ragionarci sopra (889).

If any one term is afforded the quality of transcendence, it is circumstance or history. Carlo does not claim responsibility for the manner in which his life has unfolded, and his work has been to fulfil his duties to mankind within a circumscribed space.

His call to the other, however, seeks to go beyond these limitations, but it is interesting that although, in the final pages of his narrative, he does appear to turn to God, his final thoughts are directed towards La Pisana. He writes:

Sperammo ed amammo insieme; insieme dovremo  
trovarci là dove si raccolgono gli amori  
dell'umanità passata e le speranze della  
futura. Senza di te che sarei io mai?... Per  
te per te sola, o divina, il cuore dimentica  
ogni suo affanno, e una dolce malinconia  
suscitata dalla speranza lo occupa soavemente  
(959).

This passage, which expresses the desire for the transcendence of the self, indicates also the materialist basis of this desire. La Pisana may undergo a process of deification, yet this must be read as the desired transfiguration of a purely earthly attachment. The strength of his desire is so intense on account of the fact that she is already dead, hence absent from the scene of desire. Like the impossible recollection of his mother's lips, Carlo's desire to be reunited with La Pisana in the place where all longing has ceased, betrays the failure of his narrative to achieve satisfaction by means of its own

realisation. The narrative ends on a note of unfillable desire which expresses both the narrator's anxiety to be recognised by the other and his ultimate failure to achieve recognition.

In this context, the significance of the novel's title may be explored. The title succeeds in juxtaposing the two principal aspects of the narrative i.e. the personal and political sides of the narrator's journey. As an Italian, Carlo has completed the transformation imposed by the century, while the term 'confessions' expresses all the ambiguity of his personal experience. Firstly, it evokes again a religious connotation as a declaration of faith, but, as has been noted, the narrative secularises this dimension. It is worth remarking too on the fact that the 'roman-mémoire' form can be said, partly, to have its roots in this religious, confessional mode of writing, locating the narrator and his text, once more, in a literary tradition. The title also implies an admission on the part of the narrator, a profession of faith and a desire for expiation. Significantly, these performative acts of language require an audience, for it is from the audience that absolution may be granted. Carlo again addresses the reader:

Eh ora che avete stretto dimestichezza con me,  
o amici lettori, ora che avete ascoltato  
pazientemente le lunghe confessioni di Carlo  
Altoviti, vorrete voi non darmi l'assoluzione?  
(957).

The reasons for Carlo's need for expiation are not clear, but it may be that all he desires, is recognition in order to confirm

and, hence, consecrate his existence. His narrative is his act of contrition, but, as we have argued, does not succeed in absolving him.

There is one final definition, however, of the word 'confessione' which although lesser known, adds an interesting perspective to the life and narrative of the narrator. In Zingarelli, we find the following as the final definition of 'confessione': 'luogo sottostante l'altare in cui si conservano le spoglie di un santo' or 'tomba di un santo'. Whether or not Carlo qualifies for sanctification is perhaps debatable, but the illuminating point is that 'confessione' may designate also a tomb or place of interment. It may be argued, therefore, that Carlo's confessions, rather than celebrating and prolonging his life, serve to enclose and bury it, sealing it off for evermore from making contact with the Other.

The confessional mode adopted by the narrator serves to locate his life within a specific literary mode. His life, therefore, becomes a literary event, bound by conventions which are not of his making. The nature of these conventions are clearly spelled out by Romberg and we shall examine them more fully when we come to discuss Pavese's La luna e i falò. We have chosen Nievo's work as a classical example of first person narrative, for it seems to expound most clearly the concept of the technique as a life transformed retrospectively into

narrative. In our opening chapter, we noted, however, that first person narrative seems to be precariously situated between two antithetical modes of language, and although Nievo does not seek to exploit their possible sites of contradiction, his text does open up gaps which will be explored by later writers. He emphasises questions of identity and draws attention to the act of memory as a major structural device within the narrative. He broaches the problematics of a self which is caught between historical determination and the desire for transcendence, indicating also the self's quest for recognition by the other. The thrust of the narrative is grounded in the desire for possession both of the past and of the text in order to establish the self as its own point of origin. All of these features will reappear in the works which we shall go on to study, yet none will permit the seemingly conciliatory conclusion suggested by Nievo's work. The idea of entombment, which we have proposed as a consequence of the narrator's design to construct a self in language, will be more acutely felt in these later texts which all enact the struggle of the self to gain recognition in the symbolic order.

Notes to Chapter Two

- 1 Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds, p.38
- 2 M. Antonietta Cortini, L'autore, il narratore, l'eroe, (Rome, 1983) p.78
- 3 Cortini refers to the narrator as 'l'eroe-osservatore', p.96 and underlines his function as a witness to history.
- 4 Nievo, pp.228-235
- 5 G. Carsaniga, 'Realism in Italy' in The Age of Realism, F W J Hemmings (ed) (Sussex, 1978), pp.323-355 (p.335)
- 6 See Cortini p.48
- 7 Paul de Man writes: 'The power of memory does not reside in its capacity to resurrect a situation that actually existed, but it is a constitutive act of the mind bound to its own present and oriented toward the future of its own elaboration.' In Blindness and Insight, (London, 1983), p.92
- 8 See Nievo, p.402
- 9 Carsaniga argues that Nievo's work appears too novellesque to be regarded as a 'genuine' autobiography. He writes 'the novel occasionally shows too clearly the shaping hand of the author to qualify as realistic; there are too many contrived meetings, recognition scenes and coups de théâtre' (p.336). It is to counter these extravagant narrative displays that Carlo makes such overt claims to truth.
- 10 See Nievo, p.330 and p.477

## CHAPTER THREE

Naming the Narrator in La luna e i falò

'Dans le récit à la première personne, le narrateur raconte ce qu'il sait de lui-même et uniquement ce qu'il en sait.'<sup>1</sup> Butor's statement is a simple formulation of the idea that the first-person narrator should, and indeed must, limit himself to the telling of things which he can be honestly said to know, or have known. The demands made on a narrator who tells his own tale are not grounded in the realm of fiction, but in that of 'real life'. His narrative function is submerged beneath the weight of his persona as the I becomes the indicator of a corporal, sentient presence, and as a result of which, first person narrative would seem to owe more to autobiography than to narrative fiction.

Percy Lubbock in The Craft of Fiction would appear to espouse this notion of first-person narrative. Despite his marked preference for the technique of 'showing' over that of 'telling', and the fact that he views first-person narrative in terms of its limitations, his assessment of it is not entirely negative – he writes: 'The loss of freedom is more than repaid by the more salient effect of the picture. Precision, individuality is given to it by this pair of eyes, known and named, through which the reader sees it.'<sup>2</sup> Three elements emerge from this statement. Firstly, Lubbock underlines the visual component of

first-person narrative, the fixed centre of vision. Secondly, he ascribes an identity to the pronoun, an identity which is again fixed, while finally, he alludes to the relationship with the reader, a relationship which would seem to involve a secondary process of identification or of symbiosis. The essence of first person narrative seems to lie in the individuality of the narrator. The I assumes authority through its very knowability, and this authority endows the narrative with its "saliency and precision". The 'loss of freedom' to which Lubbock refers, is the loss of omniscience which characterises third person narrative, the so-called 'stronger method'. (145). His approach is based on a humanist conception of the uniqueness of the self, but his subsequent remarks serve to undermine the notion of the I as a repository of truth. He writes: 'when the man in the book is expected to make a picture of himself, a searching and elaborate portrait, then the limit of his capacity is touched and passed' (140). Thus the first person narrator is exposed. The I by means of which a presence was established in the narrative, now signals an empty space, an absence. The I cannot represent itself in discourse, no longer its own discourse, for the I can only tell of the other. It can only appear as a product of this telling as the converse of otherness. I is always negatively defined.

Two further comments by Lubbock reinforce the idea of the I as negative space. Of David Copperfield, a first person



narrative, he writes: 'It is the story of what happened around him, not within. David offers a pair of eyes and a memory, nothing further is demanded of him' (129-130). Structurally, David is posited as the subject of this sentence, but as a narrator he is not valued as a subject, but merely as a witness, a recorder of all that occurs near to him, but not inside him. This is paralleled with Lubbock's remarks on Strether in The Ambassadors, a third person narrative: 'He is enough to prove finally how far the intricate performance of thought is beyond the power of man to record in his own language' (145). The I which was initially defined in terms of its fullness, its solidity, is ultimately defined by its lack, its inability to represent itself in language.

Lubbock's panoramic account of literary technique does not dwell at length on first person narrative nor on the possible contradictions inherent in his discourse. He has done enough to focus our attention on problematic areas relating to first person narrative. The I is both privileged as a locus of authenticity, meaning and authority, and denigrated as an area of non-signification. The I is there in order to bear witness, but in his testimony, the self is shrouded in silence. The I with its unchallenged powers of knowledge, vision and memory is at once the origin of the text's meaning, but also the limit of its expression. Lubbock consigns the I to the very margins of the text, while, at the same time, the existence of the I is the

central feature of his discussion of first person narrative. Its presence defines the status of the text, but the text defies it to represent itself.

We already noted that similar ambiguities occur in the work of Hamburger. The 'I' of first person narrative, she argues, does not indicate the subjectivity of the form, but rather the 'objective' nature of the narrative, given that it is grounded in an 'historical' context. While on the one hand, external reality is objectified by the discourse of the 'I', on the other, this idea has important ramifications for the status of the 'I' itself.

The past life, that former world of people, things and events overshadows the statement-subject, even if he does portray himself as being present in every moment of this past life in the form of his earlier self - as indeed he must if the first person narrative form is to be maintained. (325-326)

Thus by Hamburger's own definition, the I, whose status had previously been consecrated as a privileged locus of signification on account of its historical identity, is now reduced to a reality which is merely linguistic. First person narrative is considered to be essentially fictive autobiography, but here the project of the roman-mémoires form i.e. the writing of one's life in retrospect, collapses as the narrating I is radically isolated from the narrated I which forms part of an objectified discourse, and undermines the authority of the discourse which had been based on the authenticating presence of

the I.

Bertil Romberg places the emphasis firmly on the autobiographical element of first person narrative.<sup>4</sup> The creation of a narrative persona by the author serves the purpose, according to Romberg, of strengthening the novel's 'illusion of reality', but significantly he also notes: 'The distinguishing characteristic of the first-person novel is the author's device of creating a fictive narrator...a narrator, whom the author interposes between himself and the reader and who is given the authority for the whole story' (9). The question of authority permeates all of Romberg's work, but is curiously textured, based on a juxtaposition of the fictive and the real. Authority is granted by the inclusion in the text of an extensive amount of biographical detail:- 'The perfect fictional memoir is that which seeks to reproduce a whole life experienced in recollection and which begins as far back as the memory can reach - and if possible still earlier' (38-39). David Copperfield would seem to be an excellent example of this, its first chapter being entitled 'I am born', and in which the hero finds himself detailing the tombstones of his family in order to verify the need to prove filiation.

Nevertheless, in his quest for verisimilitude Romberg, seems to be pushing back the boundaries of the verisimilar, for he does not call into question what he refers to as the 'perspective of

recollection', nor the certainty of the narrator's knowledge. Biographical detail seems to create a framework around which the narrator can weave his life story. In reference to narratorial self-depiction Romberg writes: 'In these depictions the reader is given an artless and direct introduction to the narrator; right from the beginning the latter sets his birth certificate before us and admits to having a local habitation and a name. It is not some vague and insubstantial "I" that is speaking. A pronoun has been made flesh' (84). Thus the reader's impression that he is face to face with a 'real person' is not grounded in the appearance of the 'I', but in the weight of extraneous information which accompanies its appearance. 'I' alone would not appear to signify, it has no inherent properties and is a signifier without a signified. When such biographical detail is missing and, in particular, when the narrator remains unnamed, Romberg is dismissive of the author's intent: 'the boundary between narrator and author is no longer intact; the author no longer builds up the individual physiognomy of his spokesman, and we are thereby deprived of the most important characteristic of the first person novel. Authenticity and the illusion of reality are no longer vested in the narrator; there is no longer any question of a rôle-narrative' (88).

That the corporal entity should vanish in the absence of the name and be reduced to a mere textual construct, suggests the importance of the act of naming in the structuring of first

person narrative. The I is to attain plenitude through the act of naming itself, but, paradoxically, before naming oneself, one is named by others. The very act which would endow the I with subjectivity does not originate in the discourse of the self, but in the discourse of the other. Presence and absence are both inexorably inscribed in the choice to name. The emphasis placed by Romberg on the proper name indicates that the roman-mémoires form is not a celebration of the I as a unique repository of meaning, but of the named-self as a symbolic representation defined by the other. The I can only signify as part of a discourse that is already given and pre-exists the I's entry into it. It is a discourse which invalidates the self by objectifying it by means of the patronym.

The position adopted by Lubbock, Hamburger and Romberg can be elucidated by reference to Belsey's remarks on the 'common sense' mode of literary criticism:

Common sense proposes a humanism based on an empiricist-idealist interpretation of the world. In other words, common sense urges that 'man' is the origin and source of meaning, of action and of history (humanism). Our concepts and our knowledge are held to be the product of experience (empiricism) and this experience is preceded and interpreted by the mind, reason or thought, the property of a transcendent human nature whose essence is the attribute of each individual (idealism).<sup>5</sup>

Humanism, empiricism and idealism, the three pillars of common sense confer a unique identity on to the subject. The man and his meaning precede the entry into language which is merely a

vehicle for transmission of the self's ineluctable message. This view informs the perspective of these three critics who initially grant first person narrative (albeit fictive) a position of privilege as a truth-bearing document on account of the fact that it is an 'embodiment' of one individual's unique experience (the text's status as 'fiction' is irrelevant here). This position is consistently undermined, however, as they testify to the incapacity of the self to represent itself in language and to signify on its own account. In order to allay the insidious doubt that, after all, the I does not signify, a process of recuperation is set in motion. They attempt to retrieve the first person pronoun from the abyss of non-signification by trying to forge an historical subject based on circumstantial data. The recourse to history culminates in the elevation of the proper name to the status of totem, in which the final residue of the self is to be recovered. Names, however, fulfil an ideological function and the name is a construct of discourse not of the self. If we accept language as a system of signs, with the signifier inevitably denoting the absence of the signified, the retreat into the proper name, rather than saving the first person pronoun from anonymity, signals the I as the locus of absence and loss. The I is a product not a producer of discourse. To identify the self with the name is to misrepresent the self, for the name indicates the locus of an ideological construct not a transcendental ego.

Leaving behind the notion of the particularity of the subject in language, Benveniste demonstrates the very anonymity of the first person pronoun as an essential fact of language. He refers to the first person pronoun as a 'signe unique mais mobile' - 'unique' in that it can only refer to the emitter of discourse, but 'mobile' in that it belongs to anyone who chooses to occupy that role.<sup>6</sup> For Benveniste, this represents the essential paradox of the relationship between language and the subject. The subject can only be constituted as such by entering language and adopting the role of speaker, while the very act of doing so places the I in a role not of its own making: "C'est dans et par le langage que l'homme se constitue comme sujet; parce que le langage seul fonde en réalité, dans sa réalité qui est celle de l'être, le concept d'"ego". La "subjectivité" dont nous traitons ici est la capacité du locuteur à se poser comme "sujet" (259). Thus for Benveniste, reality is the reality bestowed by language. Language is convention, as is form, and therefore the attempt of the I to construct itself, its autobiography, in language is concerned more with the possibility of adhering to a pre-existing form than to the ability to give expression to a unique self.

Philippe Lejeune, while largely agreeing with Benveniste's thesis, finds in the use of the name, a means of retrieving the first person pronoun from the abyss of anonymity. He writes:

'Naturellement, ce n'est pas un aspect de la conjugaison du verbe, et Benveniste a raison de

souligner la fonction économique du "je":  
 mais, en oubliant d'articuler sur la catégorie  
 lexicale des noms de personne, il rend  
 incompréhensible le fait que chacun, utilisant  
 le "je", ne se perd pas pour autant dans  
 l'anonymat, et est toujours capable d'énoncer  
 ce qu'il y a d'irréductible en se nommant' and  
 goes on to state 'C'est dans le nom propre que  
 personne et discours s'articulent avant même de  
 s'articuler dans la première personne'.<sup>7</sup>

Without recourse to the name, the 'authenticity' of first person narrative cannot be guaranteed. Authority which the first person text has as history, initially is posited as being a product of the I, but, subsequently, is seen to depend on the revealing of an identity formally conferred by the other. Like Lubbock, Lejeune prefers to deal with 'a pair of eyes known and named', for the refusal or the inability to name, not only subverts the text, but also the humanist ideology of the self which is seen to be the foundation of first person narrative. The system of values which had claimed iconic status for the I, but which, in fact, sought refuge in the socially determined patronym, is laid bare. Authority no longer lies with the self, but with the other. The ideology which would uphold the supremacy of the subject, ultimately, validates the subject only when it has become securely objectified within the social order. Lejeune's assertion that 'le sujet profond de l'autobiographie, c'est le nom propre' (33) is revealing for it encapsulates the schism implicit in this ideology. Autobiography becomes not the history of an I, but of the name as the final repository of identity, of meaning. Names, however, are not directly motivated signs and are in themselves arbitrary designations, functioning only as



part of a larger system. They can only 'stand for', and as such draw attention to the absence of their object. To designate the name as locus of the self, is to assert the power of the social over the private, while paradoxically claiming to value the self as the origin of subjectivity.

The ambivalence created by this fetishistic attachment to the name is examined by Barthes in 'Proust et les noms'.<sup>8</sup> He details the three properties which supposedly adhere to the name: 'le pouvoir d'essentialisation (puisque'il ne désigne qu'un seul référent), le pouvoir de citation (puisque'on peut appeler à discretion toute l'essence enfermée dans le nom, en le proférant), le pouvoir d'exploration (puisque l'on "déplie" un nom propre exactement comme on fait d'un souvenir)'. He goes on: 'Le Nom propre est en quelque sorte la forme linguistique de la réminiscence' (124). Barthes underlines notions of power and of plenitude which are attached to the name. It is to be argued however that the power and plenitude by means of which the name assumes its authority are not properties of the named, but of the namer. He who names has power over discourse. To be named is to be recognised by that power and to be permitted entry into the discursive space; the I becomes anchored as a socially constituted referent. Subsequently, to name oneself in discourse, is to repeat the process of naming by the other, and to acquiesce to its power. The failure or incapacity to name oneself may be interpreted as an act of subversion by refusing

the authority of the other's discourse, or it may reflect the fact that discourse has not recognised the subject in the first place and, consequently, the subject is unable to occupy discursive space. Unrecognised by discourse, the unnamed 'subject' cannot be spoken about and his status as an emitter of discourse (the function of the I) is provisional and sporadic.

Once named, the subject is allowed entry into the economic system of discourse. As a unit of exchange, the named subject forms part of its system of signs. As a unit of value, however, its nature is of a different order. Its value is not a reflection of the self, but of the self as it is constituted by that which lies outside. For the I to become more than just the paradigm of its linguistic traits, it must be established as a signifier within the prevailing order of values, and it is this order which is the determinant of the self as meaning. The name may be seen as a bridge between the self and the other, but it is a bridge built by the other and governed by it. This dimension is concealed by a humanist view of the self. For Barthes, the name is the illusory locus of the identification of the self. He writes:

Ce qui donne l'illusion que la somme [i.e. the sum total of the semic traits apportioned to the 'subject'] est supplémentée d'un reste précieux (quelquechose comme l'individualité, en ce que qualitative, ineffable, elle échapperait à la vulgaire comptabilité des caractères composants), c'est le Nom Propre, la différence remplie de son propre... Dès lors qu'il existe un Nom (fût-ce un prénom) vers quoi affluer et sur quoi se fixer, les

sèmes deviennent des prédicats, inducteurs de vérité et le Nom devient sujet.<sup>9</sup>

The notion of the name becoming the subject is radically different to the common sense view that, conversely, the subject is endowed with a name. It follows on that the novel, the most bourgeois of genres, should incorporate the fetish of the name into its structure. Barthes continues: 'On peut dire que le propre du récit n'est pas l'action, mais le personnage comme Nom propre' (197). The fiction of the 'well-rounded' character rests on the presence of the name which conceals the status of the subject as a property of discourse. As long as the subject remains unnamed, it cannot exist. To be named, is to submit to the power of a pre-existing order which calls the subject into being, and the myth of the self as unique essence is destroyed. The result of this is conveyed by Barthes in his remarks on the narrator of A la recherche du temps perdu: 'Toute subversion ou toute soumission romanesque commence donc par le Nom propre; si précise - si bien précisée - que soit la situation sociale du narrateur proustien, son absence de nom, périlleusement entretenue, provoque une déflation capitale de l'illusion réaliste' (102).

The ambivalent status which the first person pronoun enjoyed in the work of Lubbock, Hamburger and Romberg is sought out and pursued by Benveniste and Barthes. To use Hamburger's metaphor, the first person pronoun is 'overshadowed' by the narrative and, paradoxically, it is the narrative and its code which afford

status to the first person rather than the converse being true. Discourse and narrative are social, ideological constructs which engender the subject, and the relationship of the subject to narrative is inevitably defined by the latter. In order to secure the I's place in discourse, there appears to be an eternal forestalling taking place. The supplement of biographical detail and, in particular, the name exist a priori to the emergence of the subject. First person narrative is a narrative of constant loss and attempted retrieval of 'la différence remplie de son propre', a difference dependent on and constructed by that which lies outside the self. The conflict seems to fuse in the symbolic function attributed to the name which would give the I a unique referent, embedding it within discourse, yet offering connotations of individual specificity. The symbolic dimension of the name, however, constitutes an extra-text with which a dialogue must be instigated if the I is to signify.

In his brief introduction to Dialoghi con Leucò, Pavese alludes to the act of naming in a way which preempts that which Barthes was to say: 'Quando ripetiamo un nome proprio, un gesto, un prodigio mitico, esprimiamo in mezza riga, in poche sillabe, un fatto sintetico e comprensivo, un midollo di realtà che vivifica e nutre tutto un organismo di passione, di stato umano, tutto un complesso concettuale. Se poi questo nome, questo gesto ci è familiare fin dall'infanzia, dalla scuola - tanto meglio!'.<sup>10</sup> The three forms of power (essentialisation,

citation, exploration) said by Barthes to adhere to the name are evoked, but also through the use of the verb 'ripetere', Pavese links the act of naming to the act of reminiscence, as Barthes had done. For the traditional critic, these two factors (the name and memory) were essentially unproblematic, abuses of them serving only to undermine the authority of the text. In Pavese's La luna e i falò, however, the unproblematic nature of these factors is put into question, to demonstrate the way in which any first person text is centred round the absence of the I as subject rather than a projection of the fullness of subjectivity.

The narrator of La luna e i falò does not present his autobiography to the reader as a totalizing life experience. His return to Gaminella may be interpreted as an attempt to seek out such a biography, but it proves to be an attempt doomed to failure, for the narrator is unable to construct the vital framework for his life by furnishing himself, and the reader, with the necessary factual information surrounding his origins, the 'birth certificate' of which Romberg speaks. The narrator's omission in not naming himself does not aim to secure anonymity, but represents the failure of the narrator to attain the fullness implicit in the autobiographical form. He aspires to this notion of fullness in his search, but the discourse of society works to confound his aim. The anxiety and alienation experienced by the I resulting from this incapacity is the major feature of this novel, structured round the omission of the name.

The search for a coherent entity or self is presented not in the form of an end product, but as an ongoing process. Chronological oscillations of the narrative which contradict the traditional notions of the form as a life unfolding, demonstrate not only the fragmentary nature of the past as it is filtered through memory, but determine a narrative logic which is of a spatial rather than of a temporal nature. The narrator of the text does not strive to achieve the status of a paper I by trying to conceal his persona within the text, but instead offers an extensive amount of information concerning his past. Indeed his apparent fascination for naming people and places belonging to his past, renders the absence of his own name more significant. However to claim, as Heiney does, that the narrator of La luna e i falò is 'unnamed' is to overlook the fact that in spite of lacking the solidity of a patronym, the narrator is referred to by three 'nicknames' which correspond to three different stages of his life and to different geographical locations.<sup>11</sup> All of these names, in some way, allude to his position as an outsider, and are connected to the economic role which he occupies in society.

On his return from the United States, he is known as 'L'Americano', a term which owes much more to his recently acquired wealth than to the fact that he has visited the USA. His attitude to this is ambivalent, for he says: 'Per uno che è



partito senza nemmeno averci un nome, dovrebbe piacermi, e infatti mi piace. Ma non basta' (10). His search is not identified with the accumulation of wealth, but with the need for an original signifier which will transcend the limitations of an externally defined system of values.

As a child he is known as 'il bastardo', a name which goes beyond his illegitimacy to highlight the fact that his adoptive parents are paid by the 'municipio' to maintain him, and he is thus reduced to a unit of currency in the family economy. His initial feelings of worth are transformed upon realising that only the very lowest classes partake of this transaction, and that he has, in fact, been rejected by the rest of society.<sup>12</sup> The narrator's attitude towards his illegitimacy is ambiguous. On the one hand, it would appear to destine him to a rootless existence, pushing him forward in his impossible quest, while at other times, he seems to exalt (albeit with a hint of bitterness) in his status as a foundling.

Tuo padre - mi disse(Nuto) - sei tu.  
- In America - dissi - c'è di bello che sono  
tutti bastardi.  
- Anche questa - fece Nuto - è una cosa da  
aggiustare. Perché ci dev'essere chi non ha  
nome né casa? Non siamo tutti uomini?  
- Lascia le cose come sono. Io ce l'ho fatta  
anche senza nome. (12)

The myth of the founding is of dual dimensions. While it offers the individual the potential of self creation, the self-

begotten man, it also creates a void which can be determined as an area of non-meaning, affording the self only indeterminate social status. In La Luna e i falò, the possession of a name is inextricably linked to material factors which in turn confer the sense of the fullness of belonging. Reflecting on the past causes the narrator to remark: 'Se mi mettevo a pensare a queste cose non la finivo più perchè mi tornavano in mente tanti fatti, tante voglie, tanti smacchi passati e le volte che avevo creduto di essermi fatta una sponda, di avere degli amici e una casa, di potere addirittura metter su nome e piantare un giardino' (41). In this society, personal identity as a construct is dependent on status within the economic order. Of *il Cavaliere*, the narrator writes: 'mi raccontò che per molte ragioni non poteva vendere la vigna - perchè era l'ultima terra che portasse il suo nome, perchè altrimenti sarebbe finito in casa d'altri' (35). In this society status and name are hereditary, and as a bastard, the narrator lacks both.

The name with which the narrator most closely identifies, is however 'Anguilla', coined during his stay at La Mora. It has its origins in the place where the narrator first attained an independent role in his society: 'In Gaminella non ero niente, alla Mora imparai un mestiere. Qui più nessuno mi parlò delle cinque lire del municipio, l'anno dopo non pensavo già più a Cossano - ero Anguilla e mi guadagnavo la pagnotta' (61). This name is not the narrator's by right but is bestowed by others



upon him. Through the act of naming is recognised the existence of another, but the recognition remains ever provisional, for what has been given, can be taken away. On his return from the U.S.A., the narrator's anxiety to address himself by this name, represents his anxiety to be again recognised by that society. By repeating this name, he seeks to repeat the bestowal of identity, the ritual of naming which had taken place in time past, but since which time, has lost its value as a signifier. By means of this name, he tries to evoke a wealth of past significations, but is engulfed by silence and emptiness. Those for whom he had once signified, are now dead, and unlike David Copperfield, the narrator has no tombstones on which to seek confirmation of their existence, and of his.

The following remarks by Dale Spender seem to highlight the issue:

Names which cannot draw on past meanings are meaningless. New names, then, have their origins in the perspective of those doing the naming rather than in the object or event that is being named, and that perspective is the product of the prefigured patterns of language and thought. New names systematically subscribe to old beliefs, they are locked into principles that already exist and there seems no way out of this even if those principles are inadequate or false.<sup>13</sup>

Anguilla is thus trapped. Named by the 'old beliefs', he is dependent on these beliefs for a continuing identity, but those very beliefs had originally marginalised him on account of his illegitimacy. Illegitimacy is regarded as a form of

transgression which is punished, by pushing the transgressor to the margins of discourse through which identity is constructed. Culler writes, 'Even the idea of personal identity emerges through the discourse of a culture: the "I" is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed by and relates to others'.<sup>14</sup> Within the parameters of the narrator's cultural baggage, the physical space occupied by the self is not construed as the locus of a transcendental ego, but as the embodiment of a function, dependent on the materialist order of society.

While it has been argued here that in La luna e i falò, the narrator's search for identity hangs on his identification with the name, Fernandez in L'échec de Pavese puts forward an alternative view.<sup>15</sup> Rather than accepting that the I is in search of a name, he maintains that the I is, in fact, in flight from the authority of the name. He writes: 'La tyrannie du nom gâte l'euphorie du vagabondage' (252). In the work of Pavese, the escape from the tyranny of the name, is associated with the figure of the 'ragazzo'. For Fernandez, the boy is essentially trying to flee his society, in order to assert his identity, and in order to achieve this, the renunciation of the name is of paramount importance: 'Rien d'étonnant, donc, si parmi les mécanismes de fuite mis en oeuvre par le jeune garçon, un des plus importants consiste à fuir son nom propre, à le perdre' (253). As an example of this Fernandez, cites the flight of

Cinto in La Luna e i falò from the female voices which call him in vain. By thus refusing to accept the name, the boy is refusing to accept the order or the discourse through which he is named. This order is, however, according to Fernandez not a patriarchal one, the law of the father, but instead is constituted around the voice of the mother. A name which no longer functions as a sign is referred to by Fernandez as 'un nom consumé', and of this phenomenon he writes, 'un nom "consumé", c'est un nom qui ne correspond plus à rien, un nom vidé de son contenu qui n'a plus de propriétaire, une dépouille morte; symbole de la victoire du ragazzo sur le despotisme des voix maternelles' (253).

Fernandez draws attention to the area of sexual difference in the writing of Pavese which is undoubtedly problematic, but it is questionable to argue that the origins of and solutions to this problem are to be uncovered in the realm of matriarchal power. In La luna e i falò there is no suggestion that the narrator is in flight from maternal oppression, and Cinto's flight can better be seen as a flight from the poverty and violence of a family disenfranchised, rather than as an attempt to escape the sway of women's power. Indeed in La luna e i falò, mother figures seem all but absent, nevertheless, it must be conceded that there is a polarisation of female gender roles. Fernandez himself states: 'Le ragazzo ne se changerait pas en uomo sans la violence exercée du dehors par l'autre sexe' (328).

The passage from boyhood to manhood seems to involve a confrontation with the sexuality of women, a confrontation which is seen by Fernandez at least, as an act of violence performed by women on men. A reading of La luna e i falò would seem to belie this conclusion.

Initially, the narrator seems to posit a dual categorisation of women. On the one hand, there are the 'positive' female characters of Gaminella and la Mora who are associated with values such as love, warmth, the family, and work, forming a network of meaning related to the narrator's childhood and early adolescence. Conversely, there are the prostitutes of Canelli who would appear to represent a different order of things. They are objects of desire to which the narrator is increasingly attracted. They are one of the lures which lead him first to Genova, and then to America, but contact with the initially unobtainable object of desire leads, inevitably, to disillusion and frustration. The frustration culminates in his relationships with American women whose own seemingly rootless existence parallels the narrator's own, thereby denying him the satisfaction which he seeks. Satisfaction denied, the hierarchy of sexual desire is reversed. Man is no longer the desiring subject, but the desired object. Woman is predatory: - 'cerca la sua soddisfazione davanti alle amiche, cerca l'uomo' (14) - and also conspiratorial.

The so-called 'violenza esercitata dal di fuori per l'altro sesso' seems to consist in the destruction of the androcentric division of the female subject which would have her as a symbol of absolute purity or of absolute evil. The narrator's retrospective assessment: 'La cosa che non mi capacitava a quei tempi, era che tutte le donne sono fatte in un modo, tutte cercano un uomo' (72), suggests the triumph of the whore over the mother. The problem is made more complex, however, as he expresses his stupefaction at the fact that the sexual act might be pleasing to all women, 'anche le più signore' (72). By introducing the dimension of social class into the debate, the narrator has focussed on the true locus of the regulation of female sexuality - the function which it has in the economic system.

That female sexuality does not express itself in, but through, the ideology of society may be seen if the 'fate' of the three sisters of 'La Mora' is examined. It is said that 'sor Matteo aveva avuto la mania delle donne' (63), and Nuto and the narrator speculate on the number of children with which they might have furnished the world. Both these facts are viewed positively. The 'promiscuity' of the sisters is treated very differently. The textual representation of the three sisters is based on antithesis. On the one hand, they are characterised by their beauty, aloofness and refinement, but early in the novel, we also learn that Silvia 'era una scema che cascava con tutti'

(56), and that later, Santa 'teneva allegre le brigate nere'. It is within these parameters that the text delineates their demise.

For the narrator, the wealth of La Mora provides a sharp contrast with the poverty he had previously known. What has been imagined by the narrator as a state of satisfaction is shown only to create greater dissatisfaction. This is the first glimpse by the narrator of the universal state of desire. The status and well-being enjoyed by Silvia and Irene are not enough. Like the narrator, they wish to escape, and for them, greater social status and man are symbols of this desire. Because of the fact that sor Matteo has no direct male descendants, the dual values of family and property are threatened. In order to secure these values, marriage must be their goal. Female sexuality is thus subservient to the demands of reproduction and of ownership. This is where the value of woman lies and where her position in the discourse of society is constructed. All three women, however, refuse to accept this articulation of their value, and their subsequent conduct signifies an act of transgression of this code.

The 'moral' decay of Silvia is followed by a period of mental and physical decay for her and her family. Her transgression of society's values is treated punitively, and the text inscribes the inevitable end of the subject who refuses to be subject to society's discourse i.e. death, the final locus of

non-meaning. The assertion of female sexuality subverts the ideology of patriarchy which must assume control of sexuality in order to ensure the survival of its values. It is through the figure of Santa that this ideology and its limits are most clearly articulated. Again she is characterised by her beauty and, therefore, is both an object of desire and of value for men. She rejects her assigned role and is castigated by Nuto as *'la cagnetta e la spia'* (56). She betrays man twice over, both sexually and politically, refusing to take sides in man's war. Her punishment for this violation is, therefore, twofold, as she is shot and then burned in the novel's final annihilatory image of non-meaning, a symbol of the conflict between the would-be subject and the authority of discourse. As Fernandez states *'il ne faut pas moins de deux morts successives pour lui faire payer la faute d'être une femme'* (346). The text articulates the ultimate sanction imposed on the transgressor of the authority of the father, signifying the final erasure of the self from discourse. As signifiers in the discourse of authority, the names of Silvia and Santa do not signify a full historical identity, but point to an absence which, in turn, points to the site of transgression.

It might be concluded that Fernandez is right in attesting to *'la tyrannie du nom propre'*, but it is for reasons other than those suggested by him. Tyranny is not exercised by *'les voix maternelles'*, but by the law of patriarchy which may authorise or



proscribe the attribution of the name, or of its signification in discourse. The narrator must remain nameless because of his illegitimacy which excludes him from the rights of property on which the discourse of authority is grounded. He will forever be motivated by *'la rabbia di non essere nessuno'* because, effectively, he can never occupy full discursive space. Subjects who have been positively defined e.g. Silvia, Irene, Santa and the cavaliere's son lose their power of signification when they violate the boundaries of authority, and this loss of meaning is symbolised by death.

It should not be supposed, however, that only those who transgress the limits of authority are denied full subjectivity. The figure of Nuto illustrates the paradox of the self as subject in and subject to discourse. Initially, Nuto is seen as a potentially subversive figure. Politically aware of the exploitative nature of society, he earns his living as a musician on the margins of that society. On his father's death, he abandons a marginal position and adopts the role of his father in order to enter the dominant discourse. Of his decision Nuto says: *'prima cosa suonando se ne portano a casa pochi, e poi che tutto quello spreco e non sapere mai bene chi paga, alla fine disgusta'* (13). He, at first, indicates the marginal nature of his position by the fact that it does not bring wealth, but then expresses disgust at the fact that the economic origins of the life he enjoyed were so ill-defined. The need is to make money,



to exert paternity and thus Nuto becomes intricately in the values of society, a subject to, not a subject in its discourse.

In order to give any meaning to himself and to the world, the statement-subject must construct a narrative. Paradoxically, it is the narrative which in turn works to engender the subject in its discourse, as it defines positions of meaning, identification and desire. If the subject is to subvert this process of definition by the other, he must forge an alternative set of symbolic meanings. The narrator of La luna e i falò adopts this strategy to combat the meanings of authority and to try to construct his own discursive space.

The retrieval of the self from the miasma of meaning/non-meaning must, of necessity, be accomplished through the use of language which already is a tool of the other and not of the self. Power is exerted through naming. The I, therefore, in order to create new meanings, is obliged to name, albeit with names already worn from constant use. In order to achieve a private order of meaning, the narrator chooses to reverse that order and meaning of things which he had known as a child. As will be seen, this reversal is necessarily based on the pre-existing terms of the other whose strength is demonstrated by the narrator's failure to rename things other than they were.

The complexity of the symbolism of La luna e i falò is a

result of the fact that it represents the locus of the conflict between private and public meaning. The moon of the title is endowed with a symbolic, cultural meaning which associates it with permanency, cyclical time and the supernatural. The narrator rejects these meanings, but they are defended by Nuto who values them as a symbolic link between the earth and the community, an embodiment of a shared culture. For the narrator, however, the moon is more importantly a symbol of his desire to escape from the confines of his poverty. It is, nevertheless, a symbol which reflects both illusion and subsequent disillusion, a symbol of desire itself more than a symbol of a desired object. The symbolism of the bonfires, too, functions in a similar manner. The annual ritual promises fertility, and also symbolises the cyclical continuity of the seasons. This process serves to suggest the inclusion of the individual and the community within the natural order, whereas for the narrator, the bonfires represent his exclusion from the world of adults, but also act as a focal point for the channelling of his desire. The impossibility of desire is inscribed in its insatiability, the only cessation of desire being found in death. The conflicting image of the bonfire renders complex any interpretation of the deaths by fire of Il Valino and Santa. It may be possible that they represent the destruction of the share-cropping system and the corrupt political order, thus symbolising the birth of a brighter future, but such an interpretation ignores the cost to the individual. The reading of the bonfire as a symbol of

fertility overpowers and cancels out the struggle to create new meaning.

The narrator's struggle to articulate alternative meanings to those already present in discourse is founded on the attempted articulation of desire. The desire for the other is developed by means of an internalised metonymic chain of imagery; 'I noccioli e la capra', il fischio del treno', 'i grilli e i rospi' and Nuto's 'clarino' serve as mediators between the desiring subject and the desired object. The mobility of these signifiers, invested only with a private signification, is subject to constant displacement and revision. They are signifiers of a desire which is itself founded on the displacement of the subject within discourse, and as such, have no power to fix meaning. That which does not signify, does not exist and its status as a signifier can only be illusory. Nuto's abandonment of the clarinet is a clear example of the way in which the symbols of a marginalised discourse must be laid aside, if the self is to be recognised as subject.

The attempt to locate meaning outside of discourse is exemplified by the narrator's mythification of geographical space. The narrator's past 'self' had created a hierarchy of location which had placed Gaminella as the site of non-meaning, ascending via La Mora, Canelli and Genova until finally culminating in the myth of America which is posited as the space

of full signification for the desiring subject. Desire and reality, inevitably, fail to coincide as the farther the narrator travels from the site of his original confrontation with the other, the less able he is to construct a meaningful space for his self. Significantly, the partial identity which he had secured in Gaminella and La Mora as 'il bastardo' and 'Anguilla' is completely negated in America where he is not named at all, except as a 'wop'. Asked by Rosanne why he chooses not to become an American citizen, he replies 'Perchè non lo sono... because I'm a wop' (86). Once again the self finds itself negatively defined.

In order to retrieve the self from the anonymity of discourse, the narrator must reverse this self-constructed hierarchy, recognising that whatever meaning the self may have, is constituted at the original point of entry into discourse. Thus America becomes the symbol of absolute alienation, of non-meaning, and Gaminella and La Mora are posited as the sites of original plenitude as the narrator returns, in order to reconstruct, to repeat his entry into discourse. His attempted reintegration is structured around his identification with the name - 'sono Anguilla' - but in order to regain this position, he must also reconstruct the space and conditions on the basis of which his identity was recognised. It is a struggle to restore 'le nom consumé' to a position of meaning, to revive 'la dépouille morte'. Indeed it is a fight against death itself, for

the text decrees death as the logical extension of the descent into non-meaning, of the failure to signify within the ideology upon which discourse is constructed.

Heiney states that for Pavese's characters 'death is less a result of disease or common human mortality than a conscious renegation, a failure to belong to life or find a place in it'.<sup>16</sup> While this argument may be valid up to a point, the suggestion of the heroic suicide implied by the phrase 'conscious renegation' belies the fact that death is not elected, but comes to signify the absence of the self and its alienation from a valid position of statement - subject. It represents the inevitable erasure of the self by the other. The 'death' of the narrator is pre-empted by the decay of la Mora and by the conflagration which engulfs il Valino's farm. The destruction of these places which were the sites from which the narrator first entered discourse represents the final eradication of the self as meaning. Gaminella and La Mora no longer occupy the same position as signifiers within the discourse of society and, therefore, the process of renaming cannot be accomplished.

The parallel function of the name and of memory posited by Barthes is echoed in other writings on the subject of first person narrative. Lubbock stresses this in his remarks on David Copperfield while Romberg, as we have seen, notes the importance of memory in the construction of the 'perfect fictional memoir'.

He also writes 'The perspective of recollection and an epic situation long after the events are two important elements in a first person novel that has the character of a memoir. The narrator knows how the narrative will end when he begins to give a sketch and account of his life.' (43) Genette in his 'Discours du récit' characterises 'narration ultérieure' i.e. retrospective narration, as being typical of the first person form. In the same way that the name was to form a continuum linking the past and present selves, so too the act of memory serves to gather together all the narrator's *I*s which are scattered through the unfolding of time. Dorrit Cohn, too, lays stress on the empirical continuity which binds past and present selves, while Pavese also has written: 'Se si racconta in prima persona è evidente che il protagonista deve sapere fin dall'inizio come la sua avventura andrà a finire.'<sup>17</sup> Once again we find that we have left the realm of literature for that of real life.

The difficulty with this approach is highlighted by Ulla Musarra Schroeder: - 'caractéristiquement l'activité mémorative n'est presque jamais thématisée et le héros-narrateur dirige son attention, non sur le processus mémoratif et ses possibles réussites ou échecs mais directement sur l'action à raconter'.<sup>18</sup> Retrospective self-narration thus eschews the problem of verisimilar recollection, and adopts a form which owes more to the demands of narrative than to those of real life. Musarra Schroeder goes on; 'la logique des événements racontés prédomine



sur la logique d'une mémoire en activité' (29). Narrative thus constructs its own sequence which overrides the priorities of memory, therefore, constructing the subject according to its demands, and not according to the expression of subjectivity. Cohn herself points to another paradox of retrospective self-narration when she alludes to 'the present, verbal act that can never recapture the non-verbal reality of past experience'.<sup>19</sup> The past retold is, necessarily, a past transformed according to a narrative structure which in some way imposes its ideology in order to mould a meaning which was not understood at the moment of happening.

A radical splitting between the experiencing I and the narrating I is established as the latter strives to contain the former within a closed system of meaning. To remember is to narrate and to narrate is to try to recuperate a fixity of meaning which will establish the self as a given of discourse. The I is posited a priori to the writing of the text, but paradoxically, it is the writing and the subsequent reading of the text which will apportion meaning to the self. To remember the past is, in a sense, to read past events and erect a logic of narrative structuring these events. However, reading is a hazardous activity, for the text constantly conceals meaning and is recalcitrant to imprisonment. Charles Kemnitz writes: 'Like Lot's wife, personal narrators look back and usually are changed by the very act of looking. Fortunately, the fate of the

personal narrator is not one of eternal silence; rather looking back allows an exploration and articulation of the foreignness of the past by freezing the reality, into something that "will never change".<sup>120</sup> He would seem to assert that the construction of a narrative of the self somehow arrests the movement of time, the flux of non-being through the establishment of a discourse of the self. Like Romberg and his concept of a static epic situation, Kemnitz seems to underestimate the fact that narrative is process rather than product. Narrative not only engages time past, but is also a time consuming activity, and a memory is as much a phenomenon of the present as an encapsulation of the past. To achieve signification, memory must be verbalised, and this process necessitates a confrontation with the ideology of the other. Like the name, it, therefore, becomes a property of discourse and its three properties (essentialisation, citation, exploration) rest dependent on it.

Implicit in the traditional concept of memory narrative as the account of a life unfolding is the idea that an older, wiser narrator looks back on his younger naïver self, secure in the knowledge of what will happen next, and able to reflect on the limited knowledge of his younger self. Life is considered to be essentially a learning experience, wisdom and knowledge being acquired with age. This is recognised by the narrator of La luna e i falò, but is immediately problematised in the following



passage:

'Un paese vuol dire non essere soli, sapere che nella gente, nelle piante, nella terra c'è qualcosa di tuo, che anche quando non ci sei resta ad aspettarti. Ma non è facile starci tranquillo. Da un anno che lo tengo d'occhio e quando posso ci scappo da Genova, mi sfugge di mano. Queste cose si capiscono col tempo e l'esperienza. Possibile che a quarant'anni, e, con tutto il mondo che ho visto, non sappia ancora che cos'è il mio paese?' (9)

Here the idea of memory as knowledge is put into question. The first chapter of the novel in many ways serves as an ending, for the failure of the narrator's search to find 'himself' is clearly stated. The narrator may well 'know' the sequence of events which go together to form his life, but he is not able to attribute meaning to them. The benefit of his hindsight is of only a partial nature. From his present standpoint, he is able to reinterpret past positions - 'Adesso sapevo che eravamo dei miserabili' (9) - but he also must admit that there are things which he had forgotten.

"Io sono scemo - dicevo - da vent'anni me ne sto via e questi paesi mi aspettano." Mi ricordai la delusione ch'era stata camminare la prima volta per le strade di Genova - ci camminavo nel mezzo e cercavo un po' d'erba. C'era il porto, questo sì, c'erano le facce delle ragazze, c'erano i negozi e le banche, ma un canneto, un odor di fascina, un pezzo di vigna, dov'erano? Anche la storia della luna e dei falò la sapevo. Soltanto m'ero accorto, che non sapevo più di saperla. (40)

The recognition that one has forgotten opens a gap in the

narrative constructed by memory. The gap evokes loss and absence thus threatening the wholeness which the narrative would construct, undermining the status of the narrative as a product of this wholeness. The passage quoted also illustrates the fact that it is not, in fact, the present I of the narrator who is remembering, but the I of 'l'altro anno quando tornai la prima volta in paese' (8). The narrator narrates, but is not remembering. This privilege belongs to an other I who acts as a mediator between the narrator and the past. This past I is, in fact, only one of the prisms by means of which the narrator tries to gain access to the past. Memory in La luna e i falò is not a privileged means of recuperating the past. It functions not as an internal subjective phenomenon, but is activated when the subject comes into contact with the real. Discussing his relationship with the past the narrator remarks: 'Bisogna averci fatto le ossa, averla nelle ossa come il vino e la polenta, allora la conosci senza bisogno di parlarne, e tutto quello che per tanti anni ti sei portato dentro senza saperlo si sveglia adesso al tintinnio di una martinicca, al colpo di coda di un bue, al gusto di una minestra, a una voce che senti sulla piazza di notte' (41).

The physical contingency which evokes the past self escapes the confines of narrative recollection, for the relationship is not expressed in language. That which is established through this contact is not a refound self which would signify outside of

time and of discourse but an I which is specified as an other. 'Per tanti anni mi era bastata una ventata di tiglio la sera, e mi sentivo un altro, mi sentivo davvero io, non sapevo nemmeno bene perchè.' (103). Involuntary memory provokes a rupture in the narrative through which the narrator tries to bind together his former selves. It escapes the meaning which the narrator seeks to discover, forcing a gap which demonstrates the absence of wholeness and plenitude: 'E un caldo che mi piace, sa un odore: ci sono dentro anch'io a quest'odore, ci sono dentro tante vendemmie e fienagioni e sfogliature, tanti sapori e tante voglie che non sapevo più d'avere addosso' (22). To belong to a world of things again suggests the domination of place over time. Subjectivity becomes objectified and dispersed through a series of metonymic relationships which defy the process of unification which the act of recollection pursues. The narrator asks: 'potevo spiegare a qualcuno che quel che cercavo, era soltanto di vedere qualcosa che avevo già visto?' (42). Memory is an activity of the present involving the setting up of a narrative between the present and the past, but to 'see again' is to try to instigate the conditions of the original confrontation with the real through which the subject was defined in the first place. Fernandez claims that 'conoscere è riconoscere, vedere è rivedere, le cose non si scoprono, se non attraverso i ricordi che di esse si hanno', but the narrator's memory is too fragmented for such a project to meet with success.<sup>21</sup>

The repetition of the past is not adequately accomplished through memory but necessitates a physical confrontation; herein lies the sense of the narrator's (physical) return to Gaminella, through which he tries to reconstruct a text of the past not about the past. A full reconstruction would require the landscape through which the narrator identifies himself to be populated, not only by things, but also by the people who had constructed the identity of the past self. Those people are, however, dead and with them has died the discourse through which the narrator had his subjectivity (albeit partial and limited) articulated. Thwarted by this, the narrator must try to erect a homologous structure in the present. In order to achieve this end, he initiates a process of self-identification with other characters. The figure of Cinto is particularly important in this respect. The process begins on the narrator's first sighting of the boy: 'Avrà avuto dieci anni, e vederlo su quell'aia era come vedere me stesso' (24). The association of Cinto with Gaminella augments the parallel as the narrator attempts to discern a repetition of the structures of his own early life in those of Cinto. The position he adopts, becomes contradictory however when he asserts: 'Mi sembrò essere un altro. Parlavo con lui [Cinto] come Nuto aveva fatto con me' (38). He is repeating the structures of the past but by changing his position as subject within these structures his identity is defined otherwise. Identity is not a position of subjectivity, but is subject to the role which acts as the signifier. The

notion of repetition also adheres to the notion of time as a cyclical, seasonal phenomenon as represented in the symbolism of the moon and the bonfires. Having failed to find a position as a full subject within a linear historical conception of time, the narrator adopts the notion of cyclical time as a kind of transcendental signifier. The paradox here is that he must accept a system of meaning based on the patriarchal law of the father in order to achieve signification, when in fact, it was this very order which had first denied him a position of full subjectivity. To identify Cinto as past self, and to create the conditions through which his subjectivity was expressed, necessitates urging Cinto to reject life as inevitable and cyclical and instil in him the desire to change. For cyclical time to function as a transcendental signifier, the subject must take on Nuto's role which does function within that order. For the narrator, however, to repeat is to identify with the position of Cinto, a position which obliges the subject to remain in a marginal position in relation to that order of meaning. Given this untenable position of the subject, time becomes the dimension through which the individual experiences lack and absence rather than full subjectivity.

The gap which is discerned by Fernandez between the boy and the man seems to relate less to the problematics of sexuality than to the realisation of the subject's lack of self. Childhood which seems to occupy a privileged position within the narrator's

discourse does so, not on account of any idyllic dimensions which it may have possessed, but because it is the realm in which the self had not recognised its lack of fullness, it is the realm of 'non-sapere'.<sup>22</sup> In retrospect, the narrator recognises the marginal status which he occupied there, but his terminology is ambiguous: 'Capivo che da ragazzo, anche quando facevo correre la capra, quando d'inverno rompevo con rabbia le fascine mettendoci il piede sopra, o giocavo, chiudevo gli occhi per provare se riaprendoli la collina era scomparsa - anche allora mi preparavo al mio destino, a vivere senza una casa, a sperare che di là dalle colline ci fosse un paese più bello e più ricco' (33). To interpret one's life in terms of a personal destiny is again to construct a narrative in order to attribute meaning, but to do so, intimates a failure to recognise 'destiny' as a result of historical forces. It is another aspect of the myth of the self which proffers again the notion of individual specificity. Only Nuto recognises the historical forces which shape 'destinies', but perhaps, for an already marginalised self, the acceptance of such an ideology is too high a price to pay.

Another aspect of La luna e i falò goes to undermine the concept of memory and the individual subject. To remember one's past is to relate the past in terms of a personal mythology which must remain consistent and whole, if it is to gain meaning. The mythology created by the narrator is undermined by the discourse of Nuto which acts as a dangerous supplement to the discourse of



the narrator, splintering the surface of meaning which he had sought to create. Just as the pattern of memory is disturbed by that which the narrator confesses to having forgotten, so too, is it further disrupted by the addition of that which he had never known. Neri sees La luna e i falò as falling into two sections - chapters 1-13 as 'l'evocazione del ricordo' and chapters 14-32 as 'l'attualizzazione del ricordo'.<sup>23</sup> In fact much of the novel does not consist of the narrator's memories at all, but rather consists of Nuto's narration or the narrator's second-hand narration of what Nuto said. Neri continues 'ciò che era passato diviene presente, vivo e attuale nella mente del narratore'. This statement can only be accepted up to a point, for the past which does become present for the narrator, is a past in the process of a radical revision. It is a past strewn with death as Nuto retells the grim fates of Padrino and his daughters and of the family at La Mora. The past can no longer be identified as a landscape of fullness, but is seen to be a wasteland of absence and of loss. The supplement added by Nuto to the discourse of the narrator alters the myth which the narrator tried to construct, leaving him with a discourse populated by barren symbols and emptiness. As Heiney says albeit in a different context 'the bonfire of La luna e i falò and the ashes it leaves behind are the narrator's final and annihilating image of himself'.<sup>24</sup> The novel effectively ends on the dual image of silence and of death, for it is Nuto who has the last word and his telling of Santa's fate negates the alternative symbolic

discourse of the narrator. The performance of memory in La luna e i falò does not resolve the quest of the I for a position of full subjectivity. The process of retrieval destabilises and decentres the I in a continual series of revision, supplements and reversals.

To found a theory of first person narrative solely on humanist principles is to avoid tackling the problematics of narrative itself. A name and a memory cannot secure an identity outside of language, for they can only function as part of discourse. They cannot occupy the position of transcendental signifiers for they are grounded in the very discourse which they would stand outside.



Notes to Chapter 3

1. Michel Butor, 'L'usage des pronoms personnels dans le roman' in Essais sur le roman, (Paris, 1969), pp.73-88, (p.79).
2. P. Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, p.127. Subsequent references appear after quotations in text.
3. K. Hamburger, The Logic of Literature. See also chapter 1 pp.22-23. Subsequent references appear after quotations in text.
4. B. Romberg, Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First Person Novel. See also chapter 1, pp.31-34. References appear after quotations in text.
5. Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice, (London, 1980), p.7.
6. E. Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale, p.254. References follow quotations in text. See also chapter 1, pp.36-42.
7. P. Lejeune, Le Pacte autobiographique, p.22.
8. R. Barthes, 'Proust et les noms' in Le degré zéro de l'écriture, (Paris, 1953), pp.121-134.
9. R. Barthes, S/Z, (Paris, 1970), p.197.
10. C. Pavese, Dialoghi con Leucò, (Turin, 1947).
11. D. Heiney, Three Italian Novelists, (Ann Arbor, 1968), p.146.
12. Luigi Perrotta, in Cesare Pavese e la sua opera (Naples, 1975) writes that 'bastardo', 'assume il significato di estraneo, di uomo che non sa più donde derivi la sua nascita', (p.82). Our argument is that the entire novel is structured round this initial lack.
13. D. Spender, Man Made Language, second edition, (London, 1985), p.164.
14. J. Culler, The Pursuit of Signs, (London, 1981), p.33.
15. D. Fernandez, L'Echec de Pavese, (Paris, 1967), p.252.
16. D. Heiney, Three Italian Novelists, p.87. Fernandez in Il romanzo italiano e la crisi della coscienza moderna, (Milan, 1960) interprets the theme of suicide in the work of Pavese thus: 'Il suicidio...è l'avvenimento che deve restituire l'uomo a se stesso, metter fine alla vita, a questa perpetua

alienazione di sé nelle cose e negli altri. Era il fine normale e naturale di un'esistenza continuamente ferita e strappata dal contatto col mondo reale; destino obbligatorio di una coscienza il cui unico rifugio era esaltare, contro il mondo reale, la propria soggettività' (p.121).

17. C. Pavese, Il mestiere di vivere (Turin, I Gabbiani, 1964), p.178.
18. Ulla Musarra Schroeder, Le Roman-Mémoires Modernes, (Amsterdam, 1981) pp.26-27. Further references appear after quotations in text.
19. D. Cohn, Transparent Minds, p.153.
20. C. Kemnitz, 'The Hand of Memory: Forging Personal Narrative' in Genre vol.XVI no.2 (1983), pp.175-189, (pp.77-78).
21. D. Fernandez, Il romanzo italiano e la crisi della coscienza moderna, p.134. Likewise, Pavese in Il mestiere di vivere writes: 'Le cose si scoprono attraverso i ricordi che se ne hanno. Ricordare una cosa significa vederla - ora soltanto - per la prima volta', p.227.
22. Giovanni Cillo in La distruzione dei miti, (Florence, 1972) writes: 'L'esperienza infantile...non costituisce un valore fantastico in se stessa, ma solo in funzione del valore conoscitivo dei ricordi suscitati da quell'esperienza', (p.110).
23. G. Neri, Cesare Pavese e le sue opere, (Reggio Calabria, 1977), p.130.
24. D. Heiney, Three Italian Novelists, p.146.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The Self, Discourse and History: a narratological  
approach to Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini

In the previous two chapters, we examined the manner in which identity was supposedly constructed through the unifying effect of the first person pronoun with its attendant constituents the name and, particularly, memory. We noted, however, the fact that the I, in spite of its apparent unicity, was ultimately determined by its relation to the other and by the space constructed for it within that domaine of discourse. While Nievo's narrator was found to be an historical object, dependent on a referent external to itself in order to achieve signification, Pavese's narrator, who has recourse to a personal mythology in an attempt to flee history, discovers that he is robbed of this personal mythology on account of its inevitable definition in terms of the other. So far, we have treated the issue in mainly thematic terms, but now our purpose is to examine the ways in which the authority of the I might be said to be undermined linguistically, by looking at the possibility of discovering other voices, competing at the level of the text itself. We shall try to discover the relationship between the I and the words which are (re)produced by it in order to know more regarding the manner in which a text may be mediated, or how the raw material of 'life' is transcribed into language.

In the first chapter of our study, we noted the importance of Lubbock's statement that 'point of view' revolves essentially around 'the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story'.<sup>1</sup> For Lubbock, the difference between third and first person narrative is crucial in that omniscience is forever denied to a first person narrator owing to the demands of verisimilitude and that, consequently, his task must be viewed as, fundamentally, a reportorial one. His function is that of a witness who can only recount events at which he was present or alternatively account for his sources of information. The only perspective available to a first person narrator is that of his casting a retrospective glance on to the past. The narrative function which the first person narrator embodies, is inextricably linked to the notion of the first person narrator as a real person and any infringement of the restrictions placed on this limited 'point of view' serves only to violate, and hence, reenforce the realist code on which such narratives are founded. The only distinction perceived by Lubbock within this category, is between the I who appears as the centre of interest, and the I who serves as a witness of great events.<sup>2</sup> His preference for the second of these two modes is due to his belief in the impossibility of self-representation, an avenue which he declines to explore, but which is resonant with possibility.

As we have noted, the duality highlighted by Lubbock is upheld by subsequent theorists. Friedman, Romberg and Genette

all tend to the idea that there is a distinction to be made between whether or not the focus of the narrative is on the teller or the tale.<sup>3</sup> However, merely to allude to this distinction is not in itself sufficient, for it tells us nothing of significance regarding the text. What we shall seek to do in this chapter is to argue that the relation in which the narrator stands to the story is a significant ideological feature, and also that the manner in which the tale is told, bears a significance beyond that of the purely narratological. We shall contest the notion of the I as a 'fixed centre' contending that the I must be regarded, not only as the producer of the text, but also as a product of it, and consequently, is as liable to fragmentation, displacement and reversal as any other textual signifier. It will be seen to have no privilege. The coincidence in first person narrative of the I as narrator and the I as character obscures the fact that the first person pronoun is not inevitably the same, but can enjoy a multiplicity of roles and of meaning. In order, therefore, to establish the relation in which the narrator does stand to the story, it is necessary to distinguish the various meanings of this signifier, drawing attention to the differences inscribed within the text and attempting to reconcile or contrast them with the idea of the I as 'fixed centre'.

Firstly, we shall look more closely at the typologies of Genette and to a lesser extent Stanzel, in order to ascertain the

boundaries and value of broaching the question within a narratological framework. Subsequently, we shall turn our attention to a particular text, Bassani's Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini, with the aim of testing our findings and attempting to go beyond them.

In 'Discours du récit', Genette offers an extensive analysis of the relationship between the narrator and the text. His book is divided into sections on Time, Mood and Voice, but it is the latter two which interest us particularly, for it is here that he insists on distinguishing between 'qui voit' in a text and 'qui parle', for, as he points out, the two are not necessarily commensurate and an awareness of the distinction will prove critical for an understanding of the way in which narrative works.

In the section of his book entitled 'Voix', Genette probes the relationship between the narrator and the narrative, a relationship which involves a spatial and temporal dimension as well as one of identification. Here Genette seeks to isolate what he calls the 'instance narrative' by clarifying the link between the act of narration and the 'histoire' i.e. the story in its pre-narrativised state which appears to us as the 'récit', through which our access to both is mediated.<sup>4</sup> He begins by discussing the 'temps de la narration' i.e. the temporal relationship between the telling and the events recounted. He

recognises four types: 'ultérieure', 'antérieure', 'simultanée' and 'intercalée'. The first of these, where events are firmly located in a time past, is obviously most common. The second refers to a limited field of narratives told in the future tense such as predictions. 'Narration simultanée' occurs in the present tense where the events related and the act of telling take place simultaneously, while the fourth category refers to instances where narrating and action are interspersed or layered, as may be found in the diary or the epistolary genres. Genette considers the first type to be almost inevitable in first person narrative, but does not necessarily preclude the existence of the others and examples are not difficult to find.<sup>5</sup> The actual gap, however, in 'narration ultérieure' between the time of narration and the time of the events narrated may often be left unstated, and the fiction that the narrative act itself is of no duration may be retained. It is also important to note that the temporal relationship between narrator and events is common to all narrative and no aspect can specifically be ascribed as characteristic of narrative in the first person.

Genette's second category of classification seeks to establish the 'niveaux narratifs' i.e. the level at which a tale is told whether it be external or internal to the 'récit primaire', the main narrative. If the telling lies outwith the 'récit primaire', Genette defines it as 'extradiégétique', whereas a teller within the tale, operates at an

'interdiégétique' level. Again the point to stress is that there is no inherent difference between first and third person texts within this category, for both employ an extradiegetic narrator whose performative narrative act is external to the events themselves.

The final category posited by Genette is that of 'personne' where, as has already been noted, he disputes the value of the terms first and third person narrator on the grounds that, in effect, any narrator can intervene in the narrative in the first person.<sup>6</sup> The distinction which he does draw, however, is whether or not the narrator participates in the narrated events or, at least, shares the same world. He coins the terms 'hétérodiégétique' and 'homodiégétique' to express this distinction before making a further subdivision within the latter category to account for narratives in which the narrator is his own subject. This form is referred to as 'autodiégétique'.

The main, and perhaps sole, advantage of Genette's method is that it enables us to locate and define more precisely the situation of the narrator, suggesting differences, but more importantly, similarities between the narrator and his act in first and in third person texts. Such similarities have been overlooked by theorists who stress first person narrative as an element of content.



Having established the position of the narrator in relation to the narrated events, it is now necessary to examine the means by which event is transformed into narrative. The visual and cognitive aspect of 'point of view' is treated by Genette under the category of 'Mode'.<sup>7</sup> He discusses the channels through which events are conveyed at the level of the 'récit', stressing that this is indeed a variable factor. While pointing out that he is stretching his grammatical metaphor, conceding that a narrative can only be told in the indicative mood, he correctly notes that all narrative is told relatively and that the degree of affirmation or knowledge invoked is not the same in every text. He divides the category of 'Mode' into 'distance' and 'perspective', the former dealing with the verbal means by which events are related while the latter examines the angle from which events are perceived.

He begins by dismantling the traditional dichotomy between mimesis and diegesis, or the Jamesian variants of showing and telling, demonstrating that they are variables which can be found in any type of narrative.<sup>8</sup> He does consider significant, however, the means by which speech and thoughts may be reported, for they represent the only element of 'histoire' which is overtly linguistic, and consequently, their transposition to 'récit' is indicative of a given narrative stance on the part of the narrator. He notes three means by which this transposition may be made. Direct speech or 'discours rapporté' is the least

mediated form, for it retains the structure of the original utterance. Conversely, indirect speech or '*discours raconté*' is integrated into the narrative and only the content of the original utterance remains. Between the two lies '*discours transposé*' or free indirect speech, which incorporates the speech act into the narrative while rendering the idiom of the speaker distinct from the narrative itself.

In terms of the regulation of perception, Genette again delineates three categories. The field of perception in a '*récit*' can be completely unrestricted which Genette calls '*non-focalisé*'. Alternatively, it can be '*à focalisation interne*' where the perspective can be identified as belonging to one or more of the characters in the narrative, or it can be '*à focalisation externe*' where the characters are always perceived from outside.<sup>9</sup> He concedes that these restrictions need not remain constant throughout a narrative and that they are, in essence, always a narrative feint. Knowledge may be relative but for Genette the narrator will inevitably know more than his characters:

Le narrateur en '*sait*' presque toujours plus que le héros, même si le héros c'est lui, et donc la focalisation sur le héros est pour le narrateur une restriction de champ tout aussi artificielle à la première personne qu'à la troisième.<sup>10</sup> (210-211)

It appears axiomatic that the narrator has authority over the narrative, and that any dropping of this authority represents a

narrative choice.

Genette's method which proceeds largely through the construction of binary oppositions is, as we have noted, contested by the work of Stanzel. He seeks to eradicate the distinctions made by Genette by merging elements which Genette had placed in separate camps. By introducing the notion of the reflector-character who may be deemed to hold responsibility for the narrative, Stanzel challenges the hegemonic position granted to the narrating voice by Genette, and suggests a more complex interpretation of narrative voice. While disputing the relevance of the simple first person/third person dichotomy, Stanzel, nevertheless, has recourse to binary categories within the tripartite division of his typological circle. He writes:

What determines the nature of a particular narrative situation is, above all, the first person as a character in the novel in the first person narrative situation, external perspective in the authorial narrative situation, and reflector-mode in the figural narrative situation. (5)

His categories of person, mode and perspective do not, at first sight, seem radically different from those of Genette, but whereas Genette seeks simply to isolate elements of narrative function, Stanzel aims to privilege particular factors in given situations without admitting their specificity.

The efficacy of these two approaches will be examined later,

for we shall attempt to make use of aspects of their typologies in order to challenge the notion of the 'I as a fixed centre'. We have already taken account of the fact that the 'I' is inevitably split upon entering language, and it is an interesting feature of first person discourse that a trace of the 'énonciation' is borne in the 'énoncé' on account of the coincidental merging of the two Is in the first person pronoun, and consequently, the self's entry into language and its subsequent erasure is constantly recorded. Yet, before going on to discuss the linguistic dispersal of the 'I', we should perhaps note the functions which Genette attributes to the 'I' as a narrator and which seem to cross over narratological boundaries, indicating the ideologically determined moment of the narrative act. Whether or not the narrator may be posited as a textual object, he nevertheless always fulfils certain functions. Primarily, he has a 'fonction narrative' i.e. the task of telling the tale.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, there is the 'fonction de régie' which concerns the internal organisation of the narrative and to which the narrator may or may not make direct reference. Thirdly, there is a 'fonction de communication' whereby a relationship is instigated by the narrator with his audience. Genette also underlines the 'fonction testimoniale' by means of which the narrator seeks to establish a relationship with the events narrated, a feature which we have already noted as particularly significant in first person narrative. Finally, Genette identifies a 'fonction idéologique' which serves to construct a

value system which will regulate the context of the narrative.

Not all of these functions will be present to an equal degree in any given text, but nor are they mutually exclusive. Their existence, however, suggests that Genette acknowledges that there is more to narration than his typology indicates.<sup>13</sup> All of the functions identified by Genette add a deeper dimension to the question of 'qui parle?', for they allude to a difference between narrative positions, and offer the possibility of viewing narrative position as subject position which will vary depending on the manner in which the subject addresses and is addressed by language, the language of the Other. Genette's narrative functions retain again the notion of authority, for they imply that the narrator enacts these roles without exploring the possibility that he is also enacted by them. This authority will be contested by our discussion. Rather than viewing the first person pronoun as a static signifier, we shall strive to identify its moments of dislocation within the text which will then put into question the authority of a no-longer stable signifier over the text which it would produce. Firstly, we shall isolate the 'instance narrative' of Bassani's novel, which we have chosen to focus on here, by identifying the signs within the text which draw attention to its own production. Subsequently, we should examine the relationship between the narrator and the events which form his tale. This will involve a study of the means by which events are perceived and conveyed to the reader, taking due

account of visual, cognitive and temporal perspectives. We shall try to demonstrate that the variety of focalisation within a first person text may not be consistent and consonant with the idea of a unique narrating voice, attributable to one person.

In Bassani's Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini, the 'instance narrative' can be defined thus:

- a) as 'narration ultérieure' - the narrative act is posterior to the events narrated
- b) the narrator functions like all narrators of the 'récit primaire' on an extradiegetic level
- c) the narrator appears as a character within his own narrative and therefore can be classified as a homodiegetic narrator.

This final point may warrant further discussion, for it may be argued that the narrator is, in fact, autodiegetic but it is not certain if the novel's centre of interest can be said to lie with the narrator. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator states that his wish is to write 'dei Finzi-Contini - di Micòl e di Alberto, del professor Ermanno e della signora Olga-, e di quanti altri abitavano o come me frequentavano la casa di Corso Ercole I d'Este, a Ferrara poco prima che scoppiasse l'ultima guerra' (3) and the novel ends when the narrator's involvement with the Finzi-Contini ceases. The narrator's life story is thus not the novel's subject which instead is defined by a particular, restricted, spacio-temporal context, focussing on those who

populated this dimension. It may be argued that the main protagonist of the novel is the narrator, for he can only tell and does tell of his relationship with the people and place he mentions. We shall return to this question later, but for the moment it is enough to establish the shared world connection.

Before going on to highlight traces of the 'instance narrative' in the novel, it is worth making some brief remarks on the question of temporality in narrative. While it may seem self-evident that the use of past tenses in narrative indicates a state of time past, some theorists argue persuasively against this. Hamburger puts forward the thesis that in narrative fiction, the past tense functions less as a temporal referent to past events, than as a figure denoting the fictional nature of these events, for from the reader's point of view, narrative is read as an unfolding present.<sup>13</sup> She finds an exception to this, however, in the case of first person narrative which as we have already noted is granted a different status in her work. Here, she contends, past tenses must be understood as referring to time past, for their significance is derived from the present of the narrating subject whose textual presence concludes a positive distinction between the here and now of narration and the then and there of narrated events. The coincidence of an I-narrator and an I-protagonist results in the forging of an existential link between two temporal planes, a link which is absent in third person narrative where the source of narration does not feature

as a factor of content.<sup>14</sup> Her distinction is not dissimilar to that made by Benveniste between the tenses of 'histoire' and 'discours' which we have already alluded to. First person narrative, located uneasily between the two systems, evokes the participation of the speaker at the level of the 'énonciation', but confirms his erasure at the level of the 'énoncé'. Here he partakes of the dimension of 'non-personne' which Benveniste characterises as constitutive of the third person role in language.<sup>15</sup> The traces of the act of narration, which we aim to uncover, index inevitably the act of 'énonciation' which are incompatible with the signs of 'histoire', and thus a dual temporality is made evident. Narrative and narration are both construed as temporal processes, yet their dimensions are not of the same order. The temporal limits of narrative are contained within the narrative itself whereas those of narration last as long as the narrative itself, but may appear to be without duration. These two orders are fully independent of each other, and are perceived as such within third person narrative. Retrospective narration in the first person, however, makes visible the link between these two orders and somehow existentially relevant, the link between two contrasting orders of discourse.

Not every narrative betrays overt traces of the extradiegetic level of narration, for to do so, displays a degree of self-consciousness which is often considered antithetical to



realist modes of writing. Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini is self-conscious to the extent that the narrative act which produces the text is openly alluded to. We shall now attempt to identify the traces of this act before later going on to consider their function in relation to the narrative itself.

The opening line of the novel immediately draws attention to the moment of 'énonciation' and, consequently, to the temporal production of the narrative. The narrator remarks 'da molti anni desideravo scrivere dei Finzi-Contini', alluding both to the narrative as artefact and to the temporal situation of the narrative act. This is stressed as he points out that the 'spinta' to write was felt only 'un anno fa', a temporal locution deriving its significance from the time of the 'énonciation' and not of the 'énoncé'. A contrast is therefore felt with the opening 'fu' of the following paragraph which instigates a section of narrative conceived of as taking place in the past and where the succession of preterite and pluperfect tenses and the accompanying adverbs of time and place achieve significance, not according to the moment of 'énonciation', but to that of the 'énoncé'. This sequence is disrupted by the phrase 'sprovvisi del permesso scritto di non so quale istituto romano di credito' where the present tense again takes us back to the present time of the narrating I. The narrator's avowal of ignorance in the present may be contrasted to the later phrase 'poiché era stato deciso di rientrare immediatamente a Roma, non dubitavo che si

tirasse dritto', where the imperfect consigns the narrator's doubts to his past self, for we learn that these doubts would be disabused shortly afterwards. It may be argued that because the moment of 'énonciation' is represented so strongly within the text, all past tenses must be understood with reference to the time of utterance. Hamburger's thesis would at once seem to hold, but what we shall go on to stress, is the mixed nature of the verbal systems and the implications of their consequences.

The extradiegetic presence in the novel is most securely felt within the framework i.e. the prologue and epilogue, which encompasses the narrative. Part IV Chapter X ends with the sentence 'E, date le spalle alla Hütte, mi allontanai fra le piante, dalla parte opposta' while the epilogue begins 'La mia storia con Micòl Finzi-Contini termina qui'. The narrative proper has ended, and this is signalled by the return from the past historic to the present tense, or alternatively, from the tenses of 'histoire' to those of 'discours'. In effect, the content of the epilogue's opening sentence is merely an echo of its grammatical structure and is thus redundant.

Evidence of an extradiegetic presence is, however, not restricted to the framework. The opening section of Part I Chapter VI is a long section of 'discours' where the narrating I offers a lengthy analysis of his relationship with the Finzi-Contini, interrupting an account of an early meeting with Micòl

and indicating a higher level of narratorial presence. This level may also appear minimally in sentences such as 'Credo che l'adozione anche da parte mia della pipa risalga proprio a quell'epoca' (170), or 'Come ho già accennato, i suoi [Alberto] interventi nelle nostre discussioni erano rari e sempre irrilevanti' (179). Similarly, the narrator's remarks on his relatives who were later to die in the Nazi concentration camps 'già allora mi apparivano avvolti nella stessa aura di misteriosa fatalità statuaria che li avvolge adesso nella memoria' (202) betrays his presence through the use of the temporal adverbs 'allora' and 'adesso' which indicate a temporal relationship with the time of writing.

From what has so far been said, it becomes apparent that any reference to the extradiegetic level of narration is characterised by 'shifters' i.e. those forms of language (present and perfect tenses, adverbs such as here/there and then/now, personal pronouns which refer to a interlocutive situation) which only signify by virtue of their relationship to the moment of 'énonciation' and which, in fact, combine to constitute the singularity of the moment of 'énonciation'. It might be added that these 'shifters' can be manipulated to construct an illusory narrative situation, for the one which is created in narrative fiction, is purely a feint, a pale shadow of the author's work of language. They are characteristic of 'discours', but not necessarily of what is habitually called first person narrative,

for the narrator of a third person text can call on these devices, if alluding to his own epic situation.

The presence of a homo-diegetic narrator, however, posits a relationship between the levels of 'narration' and 'histoire' absent from third person narrative. The nature of this relationship is, nevertheless, only conceivable through the 'récit', where the narrating voice becomes textualised, and it is this textualisation which serves as the mediating factor between past and present selves. The levels of 'narration' and 'histoire' which can both be considered historical and performative are inaccessible by means other than that of narrative. The question of identity between past and present selves must be treated as a textual and not an existential construct, and we must now attempt to analyse the relationship between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic Is. We must attempt to establish the means by which the I of 'histoire' is mediated by the narrative act and the means by which information may be regulated within a first person text. As Genette points out this can be done either through the transcription of language or through the adoption of a visual perspective.

The textual reproduction of speech can, as we have noted, occur in three forms:- direct speech, indirect speech and free indirect speech. All three would seem to incorporate, in some way, the voice of another into the narrator's text. In direct

speech, the statement of the other is reproduced in its original form, thus it may be argued that in this instance an event of the 'histoire' is transcribed without mediation in the 'récit', and that the other voice interrupts the narrator's monotone. Nevertheless, it can be asserted that direct speech is ultimately subordinate to the narrative context in which it is reproduced, for its reproduction is dependent on a narrative choice which erases the original performance of the utterance. If it is introduced by an interlocutive verb, the guiding hand of a narratorial presence is apparent, but even when this is lacking, the mere fact of repetition or re-creation signals the return from a different source.

The reproduction of language in the form of indirect speech subordinates the utterance to its narrative context to an even larger degree. The idiom of the speaker is no longer retained and the performative nature of the utterance is absorbed into the text. The original utterance is described rather than reproduced, for the moment of 'énonciation' is lost, even if the sense of the 'énoncé' remains. It might be concluded, at this stage, that neither direct nor indirect speech impinge upon nor interfere with the authority of the narratorial voice, and their presence may be ascribed simply to what Genette has termed the narrator's 'fonction de régie' i.e. his role in handling the internal organisation of the narrative.



The use of free indirect speech raises questions of a different order intimated by Genette who writes, 'dans le discours indirect libre, le narrateur assume le discours du personnage, ou si l'on préfère le personnage parle par la voix du narrateur et les deux instances sont alors confondues' (194). Genette barely goes into the problematics of indirect free speech, but his remarks are suggestive of the potential confusion of voices which the technique may present. This confusion of voices proposes an element of disruption which the other two forms did not instigate, a disruption which may undermine the concept of the 'fixed centre'.

In what is still the most authoritative and complete work on this subject, Marguerite Lips in Le style indirect libre compares this technique with the two other modes of speech (and thought) rendition and locates it as lying somewhere between the two.<sup>16</sup> She sees it as a purely literary form, impossible in speech, and as something reserved for the domain of third person narrative.<sup>17</sup> When the original utterance is transposed into indirect free speech, Lips notes the following alterations: there is a change of tense identical to that which occurs in the transformation from direct to indirect speech, and there is also a similar change in pronominal forms. However, when the utterance is rendered into free indirect speech, Lips notes that adverbs of time and place i.e. the here and now of utterance, remain unaltered and significantly that the performative nature of the

utterance remains. Cohn was later to summarise the process as follows: 'It (free indirect style) may be most succinctly defined as the technique for rendering a character's thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third person reference and the basic tense of narration'.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of first person narrative, one difficulty is immediately apparent. There can be no pronominal change in the utterance of an I-character if it is transposed from direct to free indirect speech. The I inevitably retains the first person signifier, and therefore, the referent of the sign can remain ambiguous i.e. whether the I denotes the narrating I or his experiencing counterpart. Lips had noted that even in a third person narrative, a characteristic of the technique was that the source of the statement may be obscured by the pronominal vacillation as it is integrated into the narrative. This problem may be resolved by the insertion of an interlocutive verb, but such verbs are not always present. Dependent thus on context for its recognition, Lips concludes that free indirect speech cannot be seen as purely a grammatical phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> She argues that the technique can best be considered a 'figure', and like other tropes, its existence will depend less on itself as metaphor than the constitution of a metonymic relationship with contingent parts. A similar conclusion is reached by Cohn who states that 'the narrated monologue is thus an essentially evanescent form, dependent on the narrative voice that mediates and surrounds it

and is therefore peculiarly dependent on tone and context' (116).

Cohn devotes a great deal of attention to 'narrated monologue' in both third and first person narrative. Beyond its grammatical features, Cohn notes that it may be employed either in a 'consonant' or in a 'dissonant' mode, the former indicating sympathy between voices while the latter serves to ironise the gap between the voices.<sup>20</sup> It is a commonly held proposition that this technique can be used sympathetically or ironically, but again this recognition is reliant on context.<sup>21</sup> This dependence on context which posits the technique as a trope, albeit recalcitrant to easy interpretation, makes it difficult to assert that the technique might sufficiently disrupt the surface level of the narrative to produce an alternative narrative voice. Cohn has remarked in the context of consonant self-narrated monologue, that although 'the narrator momentarily identifies with his past self, giving up his temporally distanced vantage point and cognitive privilege for his past time bound bewilderments and vacillations' (167), her conclusion is that 'consonant presentation of a past consciousness is dependent on the self-effacement of the narrating voice and few authors of autobiographical fiction have been willing or able to silence this voice completely' (171). For Cohn, the alternative voice has but a transitory existence and is perpetually subject to the authoritative perspective of the narrating I.



Conversely, Stanzel apportions a more substantial role to the possibilities of free indirect speech in narrative. His rejection of a simple dichotomy between third and first person narratives and the introduction of the character-reflector as a narrative agent lay greater stress on the significance of mediacy of representation. In the case of first person narrative, Stanzel argues that if events are filtered through the consciousness of the experiencing I, the narrative moves from first person to figural narration. Characteristic of this change are the absence of the signs of an extradiegetic presence and the abandonment of hindsight.<sup>22</sup> The withdrawal of the narrator and the subsequent liberation of the past self is achieved mainly by a continued use of indirect free style. He writes:

Free indirect style as a form for rendering thought in a first person narrative situation creates a latitude of expression for the subjectivity of experience of the experiencing self in which it can develop undisturbed, although often only temporarily so, by the other 'persona' of its person, the narrating self.' (224)

Although again highlighting the temporal limitations of the alternative voice, Stanzel is suggesting that indirect free style is much more than a trope, for the form is not necessarily closed by the context proffered by the narratorial presence. We shall now turn our attention to how the technique is employed in I1 giardino dei Finzi-Contini to discover the viability of an alternative voice.

The work of Bassani has long been noted for the extensive use made of free indirect style, and in Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini it seems possible to identify three different voices which find expression through the employment of this technique.<sup>23</sup> Firstly, the mode is used to convey the speech and thoughts of the narrator's past self. Secondly, it is used to reproduce the speech of other characters in the novel (the demands of verisimilitude in first person narrative prohibit forays into the inner life of others) while, finally, it is used to communicate the voice of a social grouping or express a general consciousness which cannot be traced directly to a single person, but which informs the perceptions of the entire community. Although free indirect style is used in each case, its manifestations are noticeably diverse.

The following two passages may be regarded as indicative of the form when used to convey the discourse of the past I. The first deals with a letter written to Micòl by the narrator which, as we shall see, is not quoted verbatim but is reproduced in free indirect style.

Dopo aver accennato alla mia prima visita a casa sua, tacendo su quanto di delusivo essa aveva avuto per me, e promettendo che l'avrei ben presto ripetuta, mi tenni stretto prudentemente alla letteratura. Stupenda la poesia della Dickinson - scrissi -, ma ottima anche la traduzione che lei ne aveva fatto. Mi interessava proprio perché d'un gusto un po' sorpassato, carducciano. ....Intendiamoci - seguitai -: anche allo stato attuale la sua traduzione funzionava benissimo, in questa materia essendo sempre da preferirsi una bella

infedeltà a una bruttezza pedissequa. Ad ogni modo, il difetto che le segnalavo era rimediabilissimo... (168-169)

The verbal forms 'scrissi' and 'seguitai' avert the reader of the fact that the contents of the letter are being represented. That the passage may be interpreted as an example of free indirect rather than indirect style, is signalled by the fact that although there is a pronominal change from the 'tu' of direct address to the 'lei' of reported discourse, and a change in the tense system from that of 'discours' to that of 'histoire', certain performative features of the original utterance are retained. The phrase 'l'avrei ben presto ripetuta' and the active force of 'intendiamoci' evoke the original spirit of the past narrator's intention, as do the inclusion of the adjectives and adverbs 'stupenda', 'ottima', 'rimediabilissimo' and 'benissimo'. These locutions are not only characteristics of the text reproduced, but index the potency of a text which has not been fully integrated into and tamed by the discourse of the narrator at the moment of writing. This feature emerges once more in our second example.

The narrator has been unexpectedly summoned to the house of the Finzi-Contini and his anticipation and surprise as he approaches the house are conveyed thus:

Andavo in fretta, senza paura di sbandare. Intanto pensavo alla sorpresa che, secondo le parole di Alberto, avrebbe dovuto aspettarmi a casa Finzi-Contini. Cos'era: tornata Micòl, forse? Strano, però. Per qual motivo non era venuta lei, al telefono? E perché, prima di

cena, non si era fatta vedere al Tempio? Se al Tempio ci fosse stata, lo avrei già saputo. Mio padre, a tavola, facendo la solita rassegna dei presenti alla funzione (l'aveva fatta anche per me: per rimproverarmi indirettamente di non essere intervenuto), non si sarebbe certo dimenticato di nominarla. Li aveva nominati tutti, Finzi-Contini e Herrera, ma lei no. Possibile che fosse arrivata per conto suo all'ultimo momento, col direttissimo delle nove e un quarto?(205-206)

The most salient features of this passage which determine the existence of free indirect style are the retention of a colloquial syntax in phrases such as 'li aveva nominati tutti, Finzi-Contini e Herrera, ma lei no' and the presence of the past-I's questions in the interrogative form. Although we are later informed of the nature of Alberto's surprise, the insistency of the interrogative disrupts the narrative of the narrating I. The corrective benefit of hindsight is unable to quench the original desire to know, and the anxiety of the past-I secures a temporarily autonomous space within the discourse of the narrator, suggesting a potentially antagonistic element. Later in this chapter, we shall return to consider the prevalence of the interrogative mode in the discourse of both the past and present Is.<sup>24</sup> For the moment, we might suggest that, unlike in the traditional fictive autobiography where questions asked by the past-I are essentially rhetorical feints on the part of the narrator, in Bassani's novel, they are indicative of the impossibility of effecting a reconciliation between past and present selves, creating an openness or fragmentation of

perspective which questions the unicity of the subject in language through the attenuation of the speaker's authority.

If, however, we turn our attention to the use of indirect free style in reporting the speech of others, one further stylistic feature emerges. Towards the beginning of the novel, the narrator reports the opinions of his father on the family of Micòl and Alberto:

Che idea da nuovi ricchi, che idea bislacca! -  
soleva ripetere mio padre stesso, con una  
specie di appassionato rancore, ogni volta che  
gli capitava di affrontare l'argomento. Certo,  
certo - ammetteva -: gli ex proprietari del  
luogo, i marchesi Avogli, avevano nelle vene  
sangue 'bluissimo'; orto e rovine inalberavano  
ab antiquo il molto decorativo nome di  
Barchetto del Duca.... (19-20)

Again we can perceive the transposition from the tenses of 'discours' to those of 'histoire', yet the idiom of the narrator's father is retained, as is the performative nature of the original utterance in locutions such as 'come no!', 'figuriamoci allora'. Also we may note that the temporal adverb 'oggi' takes its significance from the time of the father's 'énonciation', rather than from the narrator's 'énoncé'. The most significant features, however, of the father's discourse are, firstly, that its peculiarities are underlined by the use of the iterative 'soleva', and secondly, that they are highlighted graphically within the text. While the iterative mode serves to underline the essentially limited psychological perspective of the narrator's father, the graphic isolation, by means of



italicisation or parenthesis, of phrases such as 'bluissimo', 'ab antiquo', 'al matt mugnàga' functions not only to reproduce a static idiom but to underline its difference.<sup>25</sup> Later in the novel, we find the same technique used to characterise certain features of the discourse of Micòl. The locutions 'tenuto banco', 'concionando per dritto e per traverso', 'comoda comoda' which all appear in parenthesis, occur in an extended passage of free indirect style and as such do not need to be highlighted graphically in order to recall the original discourse of the speaker.<sup>26</sup> The employment of such graphic indicators changes the very nature of the word as sign for the word made different, in turn, points to the difference of the speaking subject. The reification of the word is extended to imply and identify the immobility of the speaking subject.

Graphic means are generally exploited to indicate the otherness of Micòl's 'finzi-continico', words which are of hebraic origin and those which are part of the vocabulary of dialect.<sup>27</sup> Instances of the half-spanish, half-venetian idiolect of Micòl's uncles are also reproduced in italics: "Cossa xé che stas meldando? Su, Giuglio, alevantate ajde! E procura da far star in pié anca il chico" (38). The narrator also refers directly to the otherness of speech in his own discourse. He mentions that the grandmother of the Finzi-Contini speaks in 'il gergo di casa' and that the Fascist henchman, Poledrelli, was 'incapace di mettere insieme due parole che non

fossero in dialetto' (182). He also exhibits an interest not only in the vocabulary of otherness but its tone and intonation.

Of the voices of Alberto and Micòl, he writes:

Parlavano ambedue nello stesso modo: lentamente, in genere, sottolineando certi vocaboli di poco rilievo, di cui essi soli sembravano conoscere il vero senso, il vero peso, e invece sorvolando in modo bizzarro su altri, che uno avrebbe detto di importanza molto maggiore. La consideravano, questa, la loro vera lingua: la loro particolare, inimitabile, tutta privata deformazione dell'italiano. Ad essa davano perfino un nome: il finzi-continico. (50)

The identity of brother and sister is inextricably linked to the nature of their language and is indissociable from it. Of Micòl's choice to name fruit only in dialect, the narrator remarks:

Non c'era che il dialetto per parlare di queste cose. Soltanto la parola dialettale le permetteva, nominando alberi e frutti, di piegare le labbra nella smorfia fra intenerita e sprezzante che il cuore suggeriva. (116)

This idea which posits an essential relationship between language and object opens up a field of interesting ramifications in the question of the relationship between language and the speaking subject, for it suggests the objectification of the subject through language. The following quotation which alludes to the speech of Micòl's father is illuminating in this respect:

La sua voce era esile e cantilenante, intonatissima; la sua pronuncia ebraica, raddoppiando di frequente le consonanti, e con le zeta, le esse, e le acca molto più toscane che ferraresi, si sentiva filtrata attraverso

la duplice distinzione della cultura e del  
ceto. (42)

This passage indicates that the linguistic diversity of the narrative cannot be ascribed to any 'godimento' of the richness of language, but is a testament to the fact that language positions the speaking subject in a context determined by class, culture and race. The peculiarities of language reproduced are not merely idiosyncratic, but constitutive of a subjectivity expressed not in language, but by language.

The erudite, cultivated speech of the professor contrasts with that of the narrator's father whose language is punctuated by hebraic expressions, but 'che dell'ebraico non conosceva più d'una ventina di vocaboli, i soliti della conversazione familiare' (41). The limitations of his knowledge of Hebrew not only represent a more restricted cultural experience, but also attest to the degree of his assimilation into the gentile community, demonstrated by his adherence to the Fascist party. His language is not solely individual, however, for, as Adriano Bon points out, his mode of expression indicates to us 'la smarrita volontà d'illusione di un'intera classe sociale che troppo tardi ha aperto gli occhi sulla realtà del fascismo'. The hypostatization of language is consequent to the subject position of the speaker, determined by a network of social implication through which the subject is ultimately expressed.



Language does not permit the subject self-expression, but is the vehicle through which subject position is represented.

Unlike the other speakers in the novel, the I-character bears no traces of a marked discourse. The lack of differentiation in his language, rather than indicating a higher, purer level of Italian, suggests instead a locus of non-identity. The ambiguity of the narrator's subject position is demonstrated by the following passage. While describing the ornamental, baroque nature of the Finzi-Contini's family tomb, he compares it to the kind of temple which was to be found 'nei nostri teatri d'opera fino a pochi anni fa' (13). He goes on:

In qualsiasi altro cimitero, l'attiguo  
Camposanto Comunale compreso, un sepolcro di  
tali pretese non avrebbe affatto stupito, ed  
anzi confuso nella massa sarebbe forse passato  
inosservato. Ma nel nostro era l'unico.'

In this passage there is a significant conflict in the semantics of the possessive pronoun, 'nostro'. In the first instance, it serves to include the narrator in a national, Italian context, whereas in reference to the cemetery, its field of meaning is restricted to that of the Jewish community. Both Jewish and Italian, the narrator's subject position is constituted at the intersection of two antagonistic vectors. The impossibility of the narrator attaining a full subject position is underlined by the development of the narrative. In the precise socio-historic context in which the novel is situated, it

is as a Jew which the narrator signifies and as the meaning of Jewishness alters, he is forced into an increasingly marginal position. The elimination from his own discourse of marked, Jewish elements may be interpreted as an attempted retrieval of a position defined as Italian, but it is the discourse of the other which will constitute this position, and in it, he is recognised as a Jew despite cultural aspirations which again would seek to reaffirm his assimilation into the dominant group. The only occasion on which the narrator assumes a Jewish identity by adopting a marked mode of speech is when he inwardly rebukes Malnate's manner as being 'un po' troppo da goi'. In this instance, his momentary assumption of otherness serves to distance him from the catholic Malnate, his rival, but he refuses to continue this process of identification. His subsequent denial of otherness consigns him to the position of non-subject for his otherness is still made to signify by the dominant discourse of the gentile.

While the narrator's insistence on the linguistic peculiarities of other characters serves to reify their utterances presenting their selves as the sum of their linguistic parts and indicating the partial and isolated nature of the subject as defined by the dominant discourse, the idiolect of the narrator might be said to represent a zero-degree of language. The elimination of marked elements does not and cannot intimate the adoption of a full subject position for the narrator remains

irredeemably other and unless he accepts the marginal position offered to him, fails to signify at all. For the narrator, subjectivity can only be negatively defined. His unmarked discourse delineates an alienation from language, and consequently, a denial of subjectivity. The 'adoption' of language is commented upon by Barthes in 'Le degré zéro de l'écriture'. He writes:

Au lieu qu'un langage idéalement libre ne pourrait jamais signaler ma personne et laisserait tout ignorer de mon histoire, l'écriture à laquelle je me confie est déjà tout institution; elle découvre mon passé et mon choix, elle me donne une histoire, elle affiche ma situation, elle m'engage sans que j'aie à le dire. La Forme devient ainsi plus que jamais un objet autonome, destiné à signifier une propriété collective et défendue, et cet objet a une valeur d'épargne, il fonctionne comme un signal économique grâce auquel le scripteur impose sans cesse sa conversion, sans en retracer jamais l'histoire.<sup>28</sup>

The narrator's attachment to his own discourse functions as a form of self-immolation as his desire for the other turns against itself and consumes him at the locus of its enactment.

It is a commonly held view that Bassani's use of free indirect style reproduces the ideological perspective of Ferrara's middle-class Jewish community, although the insistence on linguistic forms characteristic of this group may suggest an ironic detachment on the part of the on-looking narrator as he alternates between positions of inclusion and exclusion with

regard to the group.<sup>29</sup> The extended use of the iterative mode dislodges the individual utterance from its immediate performative context, but affords it an ideological impetus which takes it beyond the moment of actuation. Initially, free indirect style is used to communicate the ideology of this limited, yet powerful community whose structures underline a desire for oneness with the gentile, fascist community and the rejection of the isolationist stance of the Finzi-Contini. Nevertheless, the continued political, geographical, social and also religious isolation of the Finzi-Contini from the Jewish community highlights with an increasing acuteness the otherness of the Jews within a dominant anti-semitic, fascist discourse upon the introduction and implementation of the discriminatory race laws. The use of free indirect style in the novel to present a group perspective diminishes as the narrative progresses and the Jewish community becomes ever more oppressed and marginalised under the Fascist regime. Gradually, the isolation of the Finzi-Contini from their co-religionists becomes less as the isolation of the Jewish community intensifies. The tomb of the Finzi-Contini which had represented the gulf between the family and their fellows, becomes a symbol of the destination of the entire community as only the prematurely deceased Alberto is buried there with his forefathers while the rest of his family perish in the holocaust. It is this obliteration of the Jewish community which effects the narrator's empathy with the Etruscans in the novel's prologue:

l'eternità non doveva più sembrare  
 un'illusione, una favola di sacerdoti. Il  
 futuro avrebbe stravolto il mondo a suo  
 piacere...in quell'angolo di mondo difeso,  
 riparato...almeno lì nulla sarebbe mai  
 cambiato.(8)

The relationship between historical and eternal time in the novel will be examined at a later stage, but already it seems possible to discern an acute historical dimension in the work of Bassani. The alteration and uncertainty of the narrator's subjectivity is brought about by a change in historical circumstance. It is this dynamic notion of history which signals the impossibility of constructing a fixed subject. If the narrator's primary identification is with the dead, it is because history has not permitted the subject to be constructed as a unified signifier, for he is constructed at the intersection of potentially antagonistic ideological forces whose relationship is constantly susceptible to modification which in turn modifies the position of the subject.

Free indirect speech which is noted for the way in which it disrupts perspective in narrative through the creation of an uncertain distance between language and the subject, seems a particularly suitable vehicle for conveying the shifting position of the subject. Language is not a value-free, transparent medium and the language of Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini clearly demonstrates a dynamic relationship with history and subjectivity. In an interview with Stelio Cro, Bassani

acknowledges, in particular, the function of free indirect style in evoking the past through the superimposing of one temporal level on to that of another.<sup>30</sup> The truth of language would appear to reside in its existence as historical artefact. The anonymity of the narrator's discourse does not, however, permit him to escape this historical dimension, for his identity does not fail to signify in the discourse of the other.

The significance of examining the manner in which language is reported is the focus of Volosinov's work: 'Toward a history of forms of utterance in language constructions.'<sup>31</sup> Volosinov argues that speech reception is determined by the socio-political context in which it is produced and re-produced. Language cannot be simply regarded as being directed towards an extra-linguistic referent, but as something which points also to the position of the speaker in discourse. He stresses the fact that words are historical entities and that their usage is also historically contrived. He writes:

a word is not an expression of inner personality; rather inner personality is an expressed or inwardly impelled word. And the word is an expression of social intercourse, of the social interaction of material personalities, of producers. (153)

Words cannot be seen as expressions of subjectivity, but as the very means by which subjectivity is afforded on a secondary level. For Volosinov, quasi-direct discourse (free indirect style) disrupts the notion of language as a vehicle for

expressing meaning through its content, by the juxtaposition of meanings which derive significance from two contrasting historical perspectives. Thus in Bassani's novel, we can contend that the extended use of free indirect style serves to open up the gap between utterances, making explicit difference, and underlining the fragmentation of the subjectivity of the speaker in language. The narrating I is unable to assimilate other language into a single, all-encompassing perspective for the other voice speaks back. Words are subject to historical change and consequently, determine change in the speaking subject. Under the Fascist regime, the word 'ebreo' undergoes a significant alteration of meaning with the introduction of the race laws, and as a result, those whose identities are Jewish are also changed. The speaker cannot tame this difference and the narrator's conflict as an Italian Jew cannot be resolved on a personal level. The presence of other voices in his discourse articulates the dissonance created by language in history. As a speaker, he enters into language, but is subsequently constituted by it. Volosinov concludes:

The word as the ideological phenomenon par excellence exists in continuous generation and change; it sensitively reflects all social shifts and alterations. In the vicissitudes of the word are the vicissitudes of the society of word-users. (157)

The manner in which speech is reproduced is thus not insignificant. The narrator's ceding of authority through the use of free indirect style is an avowal of the incompleteness of



a subjectivity constructed by a medium itself constantly in flux. The first person pronoun cannot secure a permanent space in which to construct a stable identity for the response to the question 'who speaks?' is not simply 'me', but the product of socio-historic factors which dominate and determine the status and the authority of the subject's platform.

In 'Discours du récit', Genette notes that the events which go to compose the 'histoire' are not only told, but are necessarily 'seen' also. In his later work, Nouveau discours du récit, Genette rightly underplays the purely visual aspect of this issue and argues that the concept might be better understood, if the term 'foyer de perception' were employed, for it would encompass a cognitive dimension which he contends, is an essential feature of the relationship between the narrator and his narrative.<sup>32</sup> Of the three types of possible focalisations identified by Genette, it would seem that only one i.e. 'le récit à focalisation interne' could be obviously applicable to first person or homodiegetic narrative. Indeed, in Nouveau discours du récit, Genette suggests that the very fact that a narrative is written in the first person imposes this specific form of focalisation.<sup>33</sup> If the centre of perception is located within the text, the narrative must inevitably be subject to this restriction of information. He also notes, elsewhere, that while first person narrative is ostensibly 'à focalisation interne', this restriction serves to create simultaneously a narrative 'à



focalisation externe' as far as the representation of other characters is concerned.<sup>34</sup> The consciousness of others remains forever closed to the narrating subject, and the zone of uncertainty created delineates the I's struggle to elucidate the past. The narrator of a retrospective first-person fiction may know more than his past self, yet unlike the omniscient third-person narrator, he cannot know absolutely, for his perspective bears the restrictions placed on that of a real person (again first-person narrative is cast into the domaine of 'real life'). It seems, therefore, that first person narrative cannot be 'non-focalisé' without seriously infringing the code of verisimilitude on which it is based, for the presence of the narrator in the text is a constant reminder of the place where the 'foyer de perception' is located. Although Genette insists that focalisation should not be regarded as a personalised attribute, for it is a narrative and not existential feature, he does specifically place limitations on the situation of the 'foyer de perception' within a homodiegetic text. Again this takes us back to the notion of the fixed centre in first-person narrative. We have determined, however, that, in terms of the verbal construction of the narrative, the narrator cannot be said to represent a fixed centre, and it is to be argued that in terms of perception, he cannot be fixed either.

It is assumed that in retrospective first-person narrative, the narrating I 'knows' more than the past, experiencing I. Time

is the dimension through which man experiences his fullness of being and effects a reconciliation between himself and the tumultuous events of the past.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, in Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini, it would seem inevitable that the dominant perspective belong to the narrating I as he casts a corrective glance at the uncertainties of his past self, secure in the knowledge of what happened next. This perspective is closely connected to what Genette calls the narrator's 'fonction de régie' for the act of narration itself entails the structural organisation of the raw material of 'histoire' as it is transformed into 'récit'. The question which remains to be examined is, however, whether or not this form is necessarily closed by the retrospective knowledge of the narrator, thus permitting us to identify a single position of authority within the text.

The supremacy of the narrating I over the experiencing I is perhaps most clearly appreciated in the use made of the interrogative. We have already commented upon the reproduction of the interrogative in free indirect speech as one of the performative aspects of the original utterance which is retained, hence, signalling the presence of another voice. In the example which we have discussed, where the questions of the past I concerning the surprise awaiting him at the house of the Finzi-Contini are reproduced in their original urgency, the narrating I, nevertheless, constitutes the final locus of meaning for the

unfolding narrative reveals the exact nature of the surprise, relegating the questioning of the experiencing I to a partial, time-bound perspective. Likewise, earlier in the novel when the narrator recounts his flight on discovering his failure to pass an examination in mathematics he hears a voice calling to him:

Alzai lentamente il capo, girandolo a sinistra,  
contro sole. Chi mi chiamava? Otello non  
poteva essere. E allora? (48)

The narrating I knows that it was Micòl calling to him, and therefore, the retention of the interrogative can be seen as nothing more than a narrative feint. However, later in the novel, it becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain a clear-cut distinction between the perspectives of the two Is, and it cannot be easily determined which, if either, of these perspectives holds sway.

As the narrator's relationship with Micòl becomes more problematic, the perspective of the experiencing I comes to dominate larger sections of the text. Hindsight is no longer beneficial, for although the narrating I may know the manner in which events developed, time has not allowed him any greater understanding of the reasons for their development. In the final chapter of the novel, the narrator considers whether or not he should secretly enter the grounds of the 'magna domus'. He asks:

E se fossi entrato nel parco di nascosto,  
scalando il muro? Da ragazzo, in un  
lontanissimo pomeriggio di giugno, non avevo  
osato farlo, avevo avuto paura. Ma adesso? Di

che cosa potevo aver mai paura, adesso? (314)

He does enter the grounds, but his questions never find an answer.

Cohn argues that her contrasting concepts of 'dissonant' and 'consonant' self-narration indicate the degree of identification between the narrator and his past self, but it appears that in Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini, the move from dissonant to consonant self-narration bears a more profound significance. If the narrating I does not know more than his past self, this undermines the fundamental notion of time as a positive, epistemological factor in the human experience, and consequently, undermines the status of narrative itself which is a process taking place in time. At the beginning of the epilogue, the narrator states:

La mia storia con Micòl Finzi-Contini termina qui. E allora è bene che anche questo racconto abbia termine, ormai, se è vero che tutto quello che potrei aggiungervi non riguarderebbe più lei, ma, nel caso, soltanto me stesso.  
(321)

This indicates not only the end of the tale, but also testifies to the failure of the narrative to elucidate the past and, therefore, also the present. The narrator's inability to know in the absolute destabilises the structure of first person narrative and its openness declares invalid the proposition that the past may be grasped through its revision in narrative.

The latter sections of Bassani's novel are characterised by

a shift from first person narration to a figural narrative situation as defined by Stanzel. Like Cohn, Stanzel believes that the change permits a greater feeling of empathy between narrator, character and reader through allowing direct access to the consciousness of the character.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the effacement of the teller-character involves an abdication of the functions of the narrator and, subsequently, the authority of the narrative is brought into question. The refusal of the teller-character to assume the role of narrator is indicative of a rejection of the value-system which would grant the narrating subject authority on the basis of a specific relationship between the self and time i.e. time as a cumulative, totalising life-experience and the self as a direct product of it.

The status of the narrator does, however, remain ambivalent for if, at times, his perspective is restricted to that of his past self, at others he adopts a position more akin to that which Stanzel refers to as the authorial narrative situation. As he tells of the circumstances surrounding the death of Guido, the eldest son of the Finzi-Contini, he relates events which he could not have witnessed, and the final excursion into the mind of Elia Corcos marks a stark infringement of the restrictions placed on the narrator in a narrative '*à focalisation interne*'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in the opening pages of the novel, the narrator's presence is revealed only minimally, betrayed by the occasional first person reference.<sup>38</sup> What he narrates is considered true

for the accuracy of his statements does not depend on him as a witness (hence partial) but on him as a narrator (hence authoritative).

Like all narrators, the narrator of a first person narrative is responsible for the chronological ordering of the narrative, summarising, relating durative and habitual actions and events, synthesis, analysis and interpretation. In short, he is thought to be the ideological centre of the text.<sup>39</sup> In fulfilling this explicative function, however, the narrator of Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini is denied the privileges afforded to an authorial voice. General statements made by him such as his comment on the early years of Fascism; 'erano gli anni folli ma a loro modo generosi del primo fascismo. Ogni azione, ogni comportamento venivano giudicati...attraverso il rozzo vaglio del patriottismo o del disfattismo' (28), are immediately ironised by his position as marginalised subject. Made different on account of his Jewishness, he signifies as a character and not a narrator, and as such, he can never attain authorial authority. This can, of course, be said to apply to any personalised narrator for every first-person narrator is seen as representing a partial viewpoint and some are given more credence than others.<sup>40</sup> In Bassani's text, it is an interesting feature that as the narrator's Jewishness becomes more relevant to his marginalisation as a subject, so the narrative moves away from a quasi-authorial narrative situation to that of a figural

narrative situation. By the end of the novel, the narrator's presence as an authoritative voice is hardly felt at all.

Just as the language of the Jewish community is narrativised, so too is their evaluative presence felt within the visual perspective of the text. The manner in which the house of the Finzi-Contini is described, reflects the perspective of an outsider looking in. The house is seen from the 'muro di cinta' or alternatively from the 'Mura degli Angeli', the only vantage points offered to those excluded from more intimate contact with the 'magna domus'. The description is rounded off with the words: 'ed ecco che l'antico sgarbo del disconoscimento e della separazione tornava ancora a far male, a bruciare quasi come da principio' (19). Here, the point of view cannot be attributed to that of a dispassionate, authorial reporter or spectator, but emanates from the commonly held group position of the Ferrarese, Jewish community. Likewise, the description of the family tomb of the Finzi-Contini is conditioned by a common perspective which berates the exclusiveness and the aristocratic disdain of the family, symbolised by this outlandish monument. Once again, we must recognise a situation in which the subject of the 'énonciation' is split from his utterance through the imposition of another perspective, undermining the notion of the subject as origin of discourse. The subject speaks, yet his voice is interrupted by those whose words he may seek to appropriate or make ironically different, but who cannot be silenced. The



subject is overwhelmed by his discourse which reveals itself profoundly historical in its implications.

Before going on to discuss this point further, we may say a final word regarding the narratological categories which we have exploited. Genette's typology had appeared to have had the advantage of setting out the divergent aspects of the 'instance narrative' and permitting a structured investigation of its operations. It has become apparent, however, that the situation is more complex and fluid than a rigid application of his typology would allow. Nevertheless, it is through using this typology that the notion of first-person narrative as a 'fixed centre' may be most effectively challenged. Rather than a universal perspective, it seems possible to identify and isolate the following positions:-

- 1) that of the extradiegetic narrator whose presence is revealed through the invasion of 'discours' into the text and who offers a perspective on the act of narration itself.
- 2) that of the retrospective narrator, the traditional 'fixed centre' whose eye is trained firmly on the past, and who is responsible for the ordering of the narrative - Stanzel's first person narrator.
- 3) that of the experiencing I whose demands impinge on the hindsight of his retrospective counterpart and who commands sections of the narrative through what Stanzel



terms 'figural narration'.

- 4) that of the narrator as author whose statements and perceptions depend on his authority as a producer of text and not on a residual, existential presence

In addition to these positions which can be attributed to the narrator, it is essential also to note how each has been historically determined by his place in a marginalised community at a time of intense crisis. Through the narrator's discourse, the Jewish community both speaks and is spoken, and its articulation affects, in turn, the manner in which the narrator may instigate his address. It is worth reiterating that point of view is historically determined as may be demonstrated by the move from quasi-authorial perspective to first-person to figural as the narrative unfolds, and the position of the I becomes less authoritative on account of his increased and intensified marginalisation. Point of view must be seen as an ideological construct for the relationship between the narrator and the text is essentially historical. As history invades and overwhelms both the subject and his narrative, so too, are his modes of articulation altered and, consequently, historicised.

In the context of these conclusions, it seems necessary to engage with certain positions which critics have adopted, regarding Bassani's work, particularly those who decline to acknowledge the historical consciousness which operates within

it. The principal criticism, which finds expression in various guises, is that Bassani's concept of history is only grasped in terms of a personal destiny. The tragic fate of the Jews is seen almost as a pretext for the melancholy dissection of the past, dwelling on private griefs and mythologies which only incidentally take place in time, for the privileged medium is space i.e. the garden itself. Ferretti, a not unsympathetic critic of Bassani, writes:

Quanto più lo scrittore, muovendosi nel grande labirinto dei Finzi-Contini, cerca di attingere ad una gravidanza storica, ad una visione critica, tanto più l'elegia e i miti del passato lo riaccolgono nel loro mondo consolatorio. 41

Ferretti does not satisfactorily broach the question of the implied masochism in his interpretation of Bassani's work. He assumes that there exists a nostalgic desire for the original wound by means of which the marginalised identity (the only identity) was constructed and that this desire holds sway over the development of a political consciousness. That the personal is inevitably political is a factor which he chooses to ignore. The flight into the garden of the Finzi-Contini is considered to be a masochistic choice and due concern is not attributed to the historic events which provoke this flight and their effect on the events which take place in this supposed mythical realm.

Pasolini's critique of Bassani is rather more searing, but not without insight.<sup>42</sup> He distrusts the tendency which he

perceives in Bassani to eternalise the world in terms of a lyrical perspective and thus fail to historicise the past in a more concrete manner. The revocation of the past becomes its own consolation. He writes, however, of the 'dolorosa, grandiosa realtà' in the work of Bassani and draws attention to what he believes are its two major aspects i.e. 'la ristrettezza numerica e mentale della borghesia ebrea di Ferrara e la grandiosità che le viene conferita dalla 'diaspora' e dalla tragedia della persecuzione'. He concludes that the motivating force remains 'il rimpianto del piccolo-borghese ebreo di non essere un piccolo borghese qualsiasi, e il suo sforzo terribile per sembrare tale'. Without wishing to dwell on the implied anti-semitism of Pasolini's position, it may nevertheless be argued that he is correct in perceiving a purely bourgeois feeling of indignation in the isolation of what were otherwise solid, card-carrying adherents of the Fascist middle-class. However, his own political position prevents him seeing that even the middle-classes have a history and that the absence of an historical perspective based on class struggle is not in itself ahistorical.

Perhaps the most accurate assessment of the political nature of Bassani's work comes from a more recent critic, Giusi Oddo de Stefanis.<sup>43</sup> She does not deny that Bassani emphasises the personal dimension, but notes that the personal experience of his characters 'è sempre il riflesso d'un esperienza collettiva

poiché essi fanno parte di uno specifico gruppo sociale che  
condivide una situazione comune'.(17) She continues:

Nel personaggio di Bassani, c'è dunque un  
profondo legame fra individuo e personalità  
sociale. Ed è in questo che può identificarsi  
l'autenticità storica della sua opera, in  
quanto essa rappresenta uno specifico momento  
di crisi attraverso personaggi che diventano  
'tipici'.(17) 44

The exploration of the past does not signify either a  
refusal of the present or a nostalgia return. Conversely it  
demonstrates that:

per gli ebrei è sempre stato così, e non c'è  
socialismo e fascismo con cui possono  
identificarsi, perchè entrambi sono pure  
sempre rappresentanti degli altri e  
rappresentati dagli altri. (66)

As Oddo de Stefanis intuits, the politics espoused by  
Bassani are the politics of difference. The impossibility of  
acceding to a full political consciousness is due to the  
marginalisation of the subject within that very discourse.  
Micòl's refusal to engage with the future and the narrator's  
supposed dwelling nostalgically on the past directly result from  
their marginalisation from the dominant order and their inability  
to combat their marginalisation.

The inability of the protagonists to affect their own  
destiny is again played out by means of the narrative itself.  
Douglas Radcliff-Umstead has written that:

The object of the recording narrator is to exact redress against time by restoring through memory the lost paradise of the Finzi-Contini: the novel as monument will accomplish the labor of consolation which was originally intended for the tomb.<sup>45</sup>

While the object of the narrator may well be to exact redress against time, his narrative bears testament to his failure. Memory, here, is not restorative nor consolatory for it does not bring the past within the control of the narrator, but remains forever beyond him. The decay of the house of the Finzi-Contini symbolises his inability to freeze the past into an eternal, everlasting moment, and the narrative which would effect this transformation in its 'labor of consolation' serves rather to entomb the narrator. The narrative results in a kind of self-immolation of the narrator whose call to the other is constantly thrown back at him. In the course of the novel, the narrator tells of his brief communications with il professor Ermanno as they work in adjoining rooms and alludes briefly to his own subsequent incarceration, a period which he refers to only here:

Attraverso la porta, quando era aperta, ci scambiavamo perfino qualche frase.... Qualche anno più tardi, durante la primavera del '43, in carcere, le frasi che avrei scambiato con un ignoto vicino di cella, gridandole in alto, verso lo spiraglio della bocca di lupo, sarebbero state di questo tipo: dette così, soprattutto per il bisogno di sentire la propria voce, di sentirsi vivi. (199)

The urgency of the anonymous call to the other is indicative of the loneliness of the speaking subject as he attempts to seek

an impossible self-confirmation through addressing whatever lies  
on the other side of the abyss.<sup>46</sup>

#### Notes to Chapter 4

- 1 See p.7
- 2 See Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction Ch IX, pp.124-141. Lubbock draws a comparison between Dickens's David Copperfield and Meredith's Harry Richmond, criticising the adoption of the first person in the latter on account of the fact that the narrative focuses on the narrator and so betrays the limits of self-representation in language. Dickens's work is acceptable because the focus of events lies outside of the hero.
- 3 See chapter 1, pp.11-14
- 4 In 'Discours du récit', Genette notes that the word 'récit' can be used to express three distinct aspects of narrative and consequently proposes an alternative set of terms in order to isolate clearly each meaning. He decides 'de nommer histoire le signifié ou contenu narratif (même si ce contenu se trouve être, en l'occurrence, d'une faible intensité dramatique ou teneur événementielle), récit proprement dit le signifiant, énoncé ou discours ou texte narratif lui-même, et narration l'acte narratif producteur et par extension, l'ensemble de la situation réelle ou fictive dans laquelle il prend place' (p.72). In our discussion of Genette's work, the French terminology will be retained. It should be noted, however, that the meaning attributed by him to 'histoire' is quite different from that used by Benveniste
- 5 Genette acknowledges that predictive narratives are rare but as examples of the other categories we might suggest Oriana Fallaci's Lettera ad un bambino mai nato and Guido Piovene's Lettere da una novizia. Both are written in the first person
- 6 See chapter 1, p.5
- 7 Genette justifies his decision to adopt this grammatical term stating that 'la "représentation" ou plus exactement l'information narrative a ses degrés; le récit peut fournir au lecteur plus ou moins de détails, et de façon plus ou moins directe, et sembler...se tenir à plus ou moins grande distance de ce qu'il raconte (p.183)
- 8 See Genette, pp.186-189
- 9 For a critique of Genette's typology see Mieke Bal, Narratologie (Paris, 1977) esp. Chapter 1 pp.19-58. Genette responds in Nouveau discours du récit (Paris, 1983) pp.48-52)
- 10 This is an aspect of the 'fictional paradox' referred to by Michael Glowinski in 'On the first person novel'



- 11 See Genette pp.261-265
- 12 Genette himself uses his typology in order to demonstrate the ways in which A la recherche du temps perdu is anomalous
- 13 Kate Hamburger, The Logic of Literature p.319
- 14 Romberg disputes Hamburger's thesis, arguing that from the point of view of the reader, all preterite tenses may give the impression of present time. As we have sustained the notion that the I of the first person narrator inevitably indexes the epic situation of the narrator, we shall uphold Hamburger's standpoint. For Romberg's critique see Studies in the narrative techniques of the first person novel pp.30-31
- 15 See Benveniste p.230
- 16 Marguerite Lips, Le style indirect libre (Paris, 1926)
- 17 This point has been revised by both Cohn and Stanzel as well as Roy Pascal in The Dual Voice (Manchester 1977) and by W.J.M. Bronzwaer in Tense in the Novel, (Groningen, 1970)
- 18 Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds p.100
- 19 Giulio Herzeg in Lo stile indiretto libero in italiano (Florence, 1963) insists even more heavily on free indirect style as a stylistic rather than as a solely grammatical choice
- 20 See Cohn pp.160
- 21 That free indirect style create either a feeling of empathy or distance is noted also by Stanzel, Lips, Herzeg and Pascal in their respective works
- 22 Stanzel notes that 'the embodiment of the narratorial "I" decreases in importance for the motivation of the narrative process, but not as a physical basis for the state of mind of the experiencing self. The narrative act is no longer overt, the reader or listener is addressed less and less' (p.211)
- 23 This point is dealt with by Maria Cicone in 'Insiders and Outsiders in Giorgio Bassani's Gli occhiali d'oro' in Italian Studies vol.XLI (1986) 101-115.
- 24 See pp.159-162
- 25 See Adriano Bon, Come leggere'il giardino dei Finzi-Contini' di Giorgio Bassani (Milan 1979) p.32
- 26 Bassani p.208

- 27 For a discussion of the varieties of Micòl's language see Ilvano Caliaro, 'Del "Giardino" di Giorgio Bassani. Il "Finzicontinico" di Micòl: tra dignità e stile' in Forum Italicum, Volume 15 no.1 (Spring 1981), pp.52-57
- 28 Roland Barthes, Le degré zéro de l'écriture (Paris, 1953) p.23. Here, Barthes is commenting upon the manner in which the adoption of a certain type of 'écriture' may be expressive of a collectivity rather than subjectivity
- 29 An example of this is the narrator's description of the house of the Finzi-Contini which is given from the point of view of the 'excluded' Jewish community looking in. See Bassani p.19
- 30 In Stelio Cro 'Intervista con Giorgio Bassani' in Canadian Journal of Italian Studies Volume 1 (Fall 1977), pp.37-45
- 31 In V.N. Volosinov, Marxism and the philosophy of language, translated by L. Matejka and R. Titunik (London, 1986) pp.109-159
- 32 G. Genette, Nouveau discours du récit p.43. This is also taken up by Ulla Mursala-Schröder who stresses the importance of the narrator's 'savoir' in the relaying of narrative information. See Ulla Mursala-Schröder, Le roman-mémoires modernes
- 33 G. Genette, Nouveau discours du récit p.52
- 34 G. Genette, 'Discours du récit' p.219
- 35 Stanzel notes that this resolution is the determinant of the classical form of first person narrative. See Stanzel p.210
- 36 See Stanzel p.189
- 37 Bassani pp.26-27. Genette terms this type of infringement 'paralepse'. See 'Discours du récit' pp.211-213
- 38 Example of such minimal traces are 'nel nostro' (p.13), 'mia madre' (p.17) and 'ho saputo' (p.18). A stronger narratorial presence does not emerge until chapter IV.
- 39 The ideological function of the narrator is a particular concern of Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961)
- 40 This is one of the main contentions of Lanser's work. See Lanser The Narrative Act
- 41 Gian Carlo Ferretti, Letteratura e ideologia (Rome, 1964) p.59

- 42 Pier Paolo Pasolini, Descrizioni di descrizioni (Turin, 1979) pp.262-266
- 43 Giusi Oddo de Stefanis, Bassani entro il cerchio delle sue mure (Ravenna, 1981)
- 44 In an earlier version of this 'Evoluzione e involuzione nella parabola narrativa di Bassani' in The Canadian Journal of Italian Studies Vol.no.1 (Fall 1977) pp.7-22, she makes this point more forcefully. She writes that the historical authenticity of Bassani's work 'rappresenta un momento storico attraverso personaggi che diventano 'tipici' e che sono validi come rappresentanti di una crisi storica' (p.14)
- 45 Douglas Radcliff Umstead, 'Transformation in Bassani's garden in The Canadian Journal of Italian Studies Vol no.2 (Winter 1978) pp.135-145 (p.143)
- 46 The issues which we have dealt with here have been raised also by Harry Davis in a recent article which unfortunately it has not been possible to incorporate into our discussion. Davis focusses particularly on the relations between memory and history and makes use of the work of Genette and Cohn to produce valuable insights into the problem. See Harry Davis, 'Narrated and Narrating I in Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini' in Italian Studies, vol.XLIII (1988) 117-129.

## CHAPTER FIVE

First Person Narration and the Literature of  
Fantasy in I nostri antenati

Both La luna e i falò and Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini are examples of the fictive autobiography, but in both the self is a problematical construct whose meaning and status are not fixed, but are dependent on the complex and shifting relationship between the subject and discourse. An essential part of the fictional structure of both novels is that the narrative is an a posteriori reconstruction of events whose priority to the act of narration is a given of the text. The authority attributed to the narrating I comes by virtue of lived, historical experience, which forges an existential link between the narrative construct and the 'real' events of the past. The I becomes his own historian, engaged in reconstructing his own chronicle.

In an interview with Anna Dolfi, Bassani has asserted that in his work, he has tried to 'dar fondo all'io e al tempo stesso di collocare l'io in una dimensione oggettiva, storica, storicista', recognising and attempting to reconcile the tension between subjectivity and its historical condition.<sup>1</sup> He writes that Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini 'parte da un proemio che colloca subito, immediatamente, l'io scrivente e l'io vivente' (85), a statement which would seem to indicate an awareness of the duality implicit in first person narrative between the

narrating I who inhabits a seemingly timeless, despatialised zone in which nothing happens or can happen outside the act of narration itself, and the experiencing I whose existence does take place in time and space and whose experience of history is disordered until structured by the literary form. Bassani insists on the existential link between the two, relying heavily on the testimonial authority of the narrating I as a guarantor of history. First person narrative is grounded in the authenticating relationship posited between the creative, narrative act and the fictively real world. The narrator of a first person text occupies a peculiar position, midway between the realms of fiction and reality, and his existence depends upon the imposition of the constraints of the latter on the former. The first person narrator may be his own historian, but he is not seen to be his own author, therefore while the 'io scrivente' constitutes the centre of textual authority, it is the 'io vivente' who, in fact, regulates the limits of such authority on account of his existence in the 'real' world.

Therefore, although we have seen that the authority of the I is constantly being undermined, for the I is shifting and various in its manifestations, its conditions of existence have nevertheless been conceived of as bearing an extratextual referent. The discourse through which the subject is constructed, exceeds the text itself, for it refers to a lived experience beyond the confines of narrative, doing so by virtue

of its first person properties. It is interesting to note also that Bassani refers to an 'io scrivente' rather than an 'io narrante', a difference which indicates the materially different aspects of the two related activities. To insist on an 'io scrivente' is to insist upon the literary qualities of the narrative, and also to evoke notions of an authorial presence rather than a narratorial one. Again images of authority are evoked through the collocation of the figure of the author and his extratextual position in the real world with the idea of the narrative as literary property. The 'io' and the narrative merge in a curious form of symbiosis, each dependent on the other to guarantee their status as historical objects. The presence of the I is dependent on the discourse of narrative for its realisation, while narrative benefits from the presence of the I through the first person pronoun's historical relation to the real world, the world which precedes discourse.

A problem arises, however, in the case of first person narratives which appear to eschew this referential aspect on which their authority depends. What happens to the I when the conventions of verisimilitude are discredited by its own narrative discourse? How does the status of the first person pronoun change when this mutual support system is challenged and overtly undermined? These are the questions which must now be addressed.



In his note to the trilogy I nostri antenati, Calvino asserts that the three stories, 'hanno in comune il fatto di essere inverosimili e di svolgersi in epoche lontane e in paesi immaginari'.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he refutes the charge that the tales might be read solely as escapist fantasies, claiming that they represent, in some way, the relationship between the subject and society. He begins from the premise: 'Dimidiato, mutilato, incompleto, nemico a se stesso è l'uomo contemporaneo' (355), concluding that his aim in writing the three stories was to 'farne una trilogia d'esperienze sul come realizzarsi esseri umani: nel Cavaliere inesistente la conquista dell'essere, nel Visconte dimezzato l'aspirazione a una completezza al di là delle mutilazioni imposte dalla società, nel Barone rampante una via verso una completezza non individualistica da raggiungere attraverso la fedeltà a un'autodeterminazione individuale: tre gradi d'approccio alla libertà' (360). Calvino's statements are interesting, for he maps out the project of the narrators of La luna e i falò and Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini who aspire to a state of wholeness, but who fail to perceive themselves as split subjects, although this split is revealed through their discourse. It is interesting that their desire for wholeness ultimately fails, while Calvino suggests that in his fantastic narratives, this desire is satisfied.

defines fantasy in a way akin to Calvino. She writes: 'fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints. It is a literature of desire which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss'.<sup>3</sup> More than just compensatory, fantasy is seen to be the very ground on which the subject's quest is articulated. This is not to suggest that fantasy abandons all referentiality to the real world, for its difference constantly demands comparison with reality, and can only be read in terms of its otherness to a previous construct. Fantasy does not make good the loss, and Jackson continues: 'Fantasy becomes a literature of separation, of discourse without an object, foreshadowing that explicit focus upon problems of literature's signifying activity found in modern anti-realist texts' (40). The function of fantasy therefore would be to foreground the difference between the subject and the other, but by denying the hierarchy in which literature is subordinate to life, it becomes its own object i.e. a discursive object, through which the subject's struggle to attain wholeness is constituted as a struggle with discourse rather than as a struggle with the abstract conception of history.

In an interview with Ferdinando Camon, Calvino offers a view of discourse which would seem to support this idea:- 'Solo se il discorso è figurato, indiretto, non riducibile a termini generici, a facilonerie concettuali, cosciente delle proprie implicazioni, ambiguità, esclusioni, solo allora dice veramente



qualcosa, non mente'.<sup>4</sup> Thus fantasy through the very nature of its oblique relationship to reality is able to construct a truer form of representation.<sup>5</sup> Stripped of its referentiality, the language of fantasy becomes its own point of reference, but tropes on its own indirect nature to articulate the language of the desiring subject.

Another feature common to the trilogy is the fact that each story is told in the first person. Of this Calvino writes: 'ho avuto bisogno di un personaggio che dicesse "io" forse per correggere la freddezza oggettiva propria del raccontare favoloso con quest'elemento ravvicinatore e lirico' (360). It is interesting that Calvino has sought to tame the otherness of the fantastic mode through the insertion of an I who is perceived as somehow comforting, a point of identification for the reader. He goes on to say that each time he chose 'un personaggio marginale o comunque senza una funzione nell'intreccio', which indicates a separation between the spheres of narration and of action, drawing attention to the narrative as a construct. (The idea of the marginalised narrator, however, must have a direct bearing on the validity of the conciliatory solutions proposed by Calvino in the Trilogy and this point shall be developed later.) Calvino then explains the way in which the presence of this '"io" narratore-commentatore' took his attention away from the events being recounted, particularly in Il cavaliere inesistente, fixing it upon the act of writing itself, and the 'rapporto tra la

complessità della vita e il foglio su cui questa complessità si dispone sotto forma di segni alfabetici'. Whereas in the novels of Bassani and Pavese, the 'story' was the story of the experiencing I, here the 'story' is in the writing not in the living.

The shift in emphasis from the idea of narrated life to life as narration leads Calvino to express his identification with the narrative act itself: 'mi accorgevo intanto, andando avanti, come tutti i personaggi del racconto s'assomigliassero, mossi com'erano dalla stessa trepidazione, e anche la monaca, la penna d'oca, la mia stilografica, io stesso, tutti eravamo la stessa persona, la stessa cosa, la stessa ansia, lo stesso insoddisfatto cercare'. Here the 'biographical' relationship posited with the narrator is not conceived of in terms of lived experience, but is located in the experience of narrating, in narration as desire. Calvino seems to suggest that the split subject can, in some way, achieve wholeness through the act of narration itself, or rather through the performance of narration instead of through an intended reconciliation, effected by the narrative between the past and present selves. He stresses the activity of the subject of the enunciation thus insisting on reversing the narration/histoire hierarchy, to offer precedence to the performative act of narration. He, consequently, posits the subject of the enunciation as a full desiring subject whose desire creates the narrative as a product of its wholeness.

Hence the reality of the subject is to be found in the material performance of narration rather than in the story which is told. Narrative is thus a guarantee of physical presence on account of the conditions which permit its existence. Reality becomes the presence of the performative narrative act. However as Rimmon-Kenan has rightly pointed out 'narration' and 'histoire' only exist as metonymic extensions of the 'récit'; thus the force of the argument is lessened, for the presence of narration can only be discerned as a refraction of the 'récit', its supposed product.<sup>6</sup>

In his note to I nostri antenati, Calvino seems to exhibit a strong proprietorial instinct over the three tales as if to pronounce that, after all, the author is not dead. Having seemingly accepted that art or language cannot reproduce life, he appears to adopt the notion that life is art/language and retrieve his authority by this means. The relationship between subjectivity and writing is further discussed by Calvino in the essay 'Cibernetica e fantasmi'.<sup>7</sup> Calvino discusses the idea of narrative as a combinatory process and the constraints which the consequent narrative grammar has on the writer. The realisation of such constraints is manifested by the *Tel Quel* group whose way out of this impasse is expressed thus:

lo scrivere non consiste più nel raccontare ma nel dire che si racconta, e quello che si dice viene a identificarsi con l'atto stesso del dire, la persona psicologica viene sostituita da una persona linguistica o addirittura grammaticale, definita solo dal suo posto nel

discorso. (167)

Subjectivity having been banished from the work, the I is no longer representative of a single identifiable self:

la persona io, esplicita o implicita, si frammenta in figure diverse, in un io che sta scrivendo e in un io che è scritto, in un io empirico che sta alle spalle dell'io che sta scrivendo e in un io mitico che fa modello all'io che è scritto. L'io dell'autore nello scrivere si dissolve: la cosiddetta 'personalità' dello scrittore è interna all'atto dello scrivere, è un prodotto e un modo della scrittura. (172)

From this apparent despair at his own situation, Calvino comes to view the writer as a depersonalised 'macchina scrivente'. Having arrived at this conclusion, one perhaps might think that Calvino would renounce all claims to writing as a vehicle for the expression and representation of subjectivity, but in a positively phoenix-like manner, Calvino goes on: 'scompaia dunque l'autore - questo enfant gâté dell'inconsapevolezza - per lasciare il suo posto a un uomo più cosciente, che saprà che l'autore è una macchina e saprà come questa macchina funziona' (173). So the self comes to rescue the author from his dilemma through the assertion of its self-awareness, and authority is restored to the author at the controls of the machine. The literary machine no longer controls the man. Calvino concludes his essay by arguing that although all narrative has the same structural composition, not all combinations have the same effect, and it is this potential semantic diversity which allows the modern writer to explore the

unconscious, say the unsaid, and challenge the ways of society. Once more Calvino's project is one which seeks to retrieve the self as a significant entity from its dissolution in the quagmire of post-structuralist thought. 'Cibernetica e fantasmi' was first published in 1967, some years after the Trilogy, yet even in his later theoretical writings such as 'I livelli della realtà in letteratura' and the posthumous Lezioni americane, Calvino returns to the same themes. At this stage, however, we can use these ideas to examine the Trilogy and see that a continual process of loss and retrieval of the self is in operation.

The conflict between the self and modern society which is said to be the main theme of the Trilogy is articulated through narrative both fantastic and written in the first person.<sup>8</sup> Through fantasy, the struggle is lifted out of an everyday context into a dimension which would repudiate the everyday by making explicit its difference, a difference which again is highlighted by a first person narrator who not only does not tell his/her own story, but is also figured as other i.e. the child narrator, the unheroic brother and the nun.<sup>9</sup> Calvino has stated that he chose the first person form in order to implant the narrative discourse into the discourse of someone else, creating a distance between author and work.<sup>10</sup> Indeed fantasy produces a similar effect, for if one might be tempted to seek correlations between the plots of La luna e i falò and Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini and the lives of their respective authors, the

otherworldness of fantasy prevents any such simplistic form of identification.<sup>11</sup> Because the work of fantasy has no direct referentiality outside itself, attention is drawn to its own artifice and to its construction. What we must question here, is the potential change in the function of the first person pronoun in fantastic narrative, for if in realist works it stood as a guarantor of authenticity, linking the narrative with the real world, the refusal of that real world must necessarily entail a restructuring of the I. A dialectic is set up between two apparently antithetical modes, the result of which would seem inevitably to lead to a revaluation of the two not only as they function in the Trilogy, but also in our perception of them as separate entities.

We have already examined the ways in which the subject is constructed in first person narrative and how the subject position is defined through and by the other. This has been analysed as a cultural, historical phenomenon dependent on a specific conception of the self. The setting of Il visconte dimezzato in an imaginary spatial and temporal dimension would seem to make such an analysis impossible in this case. Nevertheless, it can be established that the workings of narrative create a subject which is not dependent on the verisimilitude of the narrative, but on its function within narrative.



The first person referent appears in the opening paragraph where the narrator refers to 'il visconte Medardo di Terralba mio zio' (9), creating a link between the subject of the enunciation and the content of the énoncé. The narrator does not actually appear as a character, however, until the beginning of the third chapter, by which time he has informed the reader of his uncle's part in the war with the Turks, and made excursions into the minds of the characters of the narrative with no attempt to justify his sources of information. Realistically, this can be seen as an infringement of the reader's genre expectations, but it is not necessarily perceived as such. A minimal degree of narratorial presence appears to permit such transgression, as in the case of Madame Bovary, where the brief initial appearance of a minimally characterised first person narrator does not limit the development of the narrative. When Calvino's narrator does appear as a character, it is in the figure of a small boy. It is generally assumed that the narrator is still a child at the time of narration, although there is nothing to indicate the extent of time elapsed between the 'histoire' and the 'narration'. Indeed sentences such as: 'Per fortuna da noi a quei tempi, i parti erano faccende da levatrici e non da medici, se no chissà come si sarebbe tratto d'impegno' (29) where the temporal reference makes a clear distinction between the then and now, suggest a greater divergence than has been proposed. It is true, however, that events are seen through the eyes of the child, and in this sense the story is told from a fixed perspective.



The 'naivety' of this perspective is made apparent in the narrator's interpretation of events such as the lepers' orgy scene: 'Non capii bene cosa successe poi; uomini e donne si buttarono gli uni addosso agli altri e iniziarono quello che poi appresi doveva essere un'orgia' (45). However, the astute use of the semi-colon suggests a gap between the narrative act and the text which is not irrelevant to our discussion, but which shall be dealt with later when we examine Il cavaliere inesistente. It does, nevertheless, indicate the difficulty of reconciling the subject of the narrative act and the construction of the text. The narrator is constantly contradicted by the very text which we read, he becomes incredible. The recurrent phrase 'Quel bambino ero io' (21, 42) places the narrator in the position of textual object, suggesting the alienation between speaker and discourse. Although the narrator fulfils a testimonial function, the events which he relates are not rendered believable on account of this, nor are they made unbelievable on account of his 'unreliability'. The narrator is irrelevant, and it is the structure and logic of narrative itself which makes the story 'credible'. The credibility adheres not to a referential link with the real world, but to an internal logic whose consistency is its own authority. It is this narrative logic which makes the tales readable. The splitting of Medardo is not plausible, but is credible due to the consistency with which the idea, the quality is maintained. Thus the narrative triumphs over the speaking

subject. Authority is seen to adhere to the text and not to the narrator.

The subjugation of the narrator to the narrative is interesting if it is compared to Calvino's claim that the major theme of Il Visconte dimezzato is 'l'aspirazione a una completezza al di là delle mutilazioni imposte dalla società'. Our previous narrators were perceived as historical subjects, but the purely literary dimension of this novel suggests that its narrator cannot be identified in such a directly referential manner. Yet, unlike the narrator of Le cosmicomiche, the narrator is not only an 'embodiment' of the narrative function, but is determined by the network of social relations, defined within the narrative.<sup>12</sup> At first, he seems to escape from the confines of these relations through which the subject is constructed:- 'io ero libero come l'aria, non avevo genitori e non appartenevo alla categoria dei servi né a quella dei padroni. Facevo parte della famiglia dei Terralba solo per tardivo riconoscimento, ma non portavo il loro nome e nessuno era tenuto ad educarmi' (24). Thus the narrator is neither an insider nor an outsider. He both belongs to, and is divorced from the family and from social stratification, and hence would seem to be free of the mutilations caused by society. We have already seen that in the works of Pavese and Bassani, family and social identity are crucial to the structuring of the self, and indeed the idea of mutilation could be suitably applied to the concept of the

self within these works.

The narrator of Il visconte dimezzato is also free from the plot of the novel itself, existing only on the sidelines of events. He seems to enjoy a certain degree of ubiquity, appearing almost at random at various points of the story's unwinding, and entering into the company of a vast collection of groups and individuals. At times, he also adopts the role of spokesman for these apparently heterogeneous groupings, commenting for example 'così passavano i giorni a Terralba, e i nostri sentimenti si facevano incolori e ottusi, poiché ci sentivamo come perduti tra malvagità e virtù ugualmente disumane' (64). Does the narrator therefore serve as an image of wholeness? His response to the reunification of Medardo would suggest not. He remarks:- 'Io invece, in mezzo a tanto fervore d'interesse mi sentivo sempre più triste e manchevole. Alle volte uno si crede incompleto ed è soltanto giovane' (70). The conclusion seems to undermine Calvino's project, for it seems to suggest that the universal condition is one of 'incompletezza'.

The splitting of Medardo serves as a metaphor for the divided self.<sup>13</sup> His splitting into a good half and an evil half does not indicate the manichean struggle, but is used to highlight the partial nature of man's experience. When Medardo is divided in two, each half becomes a whole, for each is devoid of conflict. The benefit of this new perspective is expounded by

both halves, for it demands a recognition of the split in man's nature. The evil Medardo's mania for splitting everything in two aims to force every man from 'la sua ottusa e ignorante interezza'. He goes on: 'Ero intero e tutte le cose erano per me naturali e confuse, stupide come l'aria: credevo di veder tutto e non era che la scorza...perché bellezza e sapienza e giustizia ci sono solo in ciò che è fatto a brani' (37). A similar realisation is made by the good half:- 'questo è il bene dell'esser dimezzato: il capire d'ogni persona e cosa al mondo la pena che ognuno e ognuna ha per la propria incompletezza. Io ero intero e non capivo, e mi muovevo sordo e incomunicabile tra i dolori e le ferite seminati dovunque, là dove meno da intero uno osa credere. Non io solo, Pamela, sono un essere spaccato e divelto, ma tu pure e tutti.' (52-3)

The effects on the people of Terralba of the good and evil Medardos are equally devastating. Their wholeness is completely at odds with the incompleteness of the rest of the world. This incompleteness is underlined by the other characters in the novel. In the figures of Mastro Pietrochiodo e il dottor Trelawney, it is exemplified by the lack of awareness which they exhibit of the relationship between their science and the lives of people. The lepers and the Huguenots represent, on the one hand, the flight from reality and, on the other hand, the destructive nature of a false sense of morality imposed on reality.<sup>14</sup> The other characters, Calvino claims, have only a

functional role in the narrative, the only exception being Pamela who is 'uno schematico ideogramma di concretezza femminile in contrasto con la disumanità del dimezzato' (356) which perhaps suggest that the female subject is spared this dilemma. This duality which has been established between the complete and the incomplete subject knows no solution, for as the narrator concludes after his uncle has been sewn back together, 'ma è chiaro che non basta un visconte completo perché diventi completo tutto il mondo' (70). The 'aspirazione a una completezza' of which Calvino wrote can be seen as no more than an aspiration, for the narrative itself defies a conciliatory solution to the question of the split itself.

We have already seen that the relationship between the narrator and narrative is one of mutual self-definition, and it is within this context that the role of the narrator of Il visconte dimezzato must be evaluated. He is, at most, a spectator of events and it can perhaps be argued that this is necessarily the role which the self must adopt in relation to the world. It is an estranged self which cannot be defined solely in relation to itself, but which must engage with that which is external to it, although no reconciliation can be effected in this confrontation. As a child, the narrator is perceived to be and perceives himself as other, but in turn this otherness is merely a metaphor for the inevitability of being other. Locating the narrative in an all but ahistorical setting does not



decontextualise the position of the subject in narrative, but only makes more obviously explicit the relations between the subject and narrative. In Il visconte dimezzato this is reflected mainly on the level of content, but in the later sections of the trilogy, the structure of the narrative is thrown into question, and this, in turn, bears heavily on the relationship between the subject and the narrative.

The narrator of Il barone rampante is one who remains marginal to events. He tells of the life of his brother, going back to the time of his decision to make his life in the trees and ending with his death. We know little of the narrator himself except that he is Cosimo's younger brother, he married, had children and spent a certain amount of time abroad. He is a self-conscious narrator, and in keeping with the demands of verisimilitude accounts for his knowledge of events which he could not have known of directly: 'quello che ora dirò, come molte delle cose di questo racconto della sua [Cosimo's] vita, mi furono riferite da lui in seguito oppure fui io a ricavarle da sparse testimonianze ed induzioni' (86), is how he begins his narrative. Thus what we read is, in effect, a narrative of Cosimo's life told for a second time and hence twice transformed. He is conscious not only of narrating, but more particularly of writing. He concludes his story in a manner not dissimilar to the nineteenth century type of first person narrative where an elderly narrator looks back and makes his peace with the past,

but the outcome of Biagio's narrative is not so conciliatory: 'Io confido i miei pensieri a questo quaderno né saprei altrimenti esprimerli: sono stato sempre un uomo posato, senza grandi slanci o smanie, padre di famiglia, nobile di casato, illuminato di idee, ossequiente alle leggi. Gli eccessi della politica non m'hanno dato mai scrolloni troppo forti, e spero che così continui. Ma dentro, che tristezza' (258). 'Tutto è cenere' is his ultimate conclusion.

As we have said, the narrator and the narrative are mutually self-defining, and if the figure of the narrator is only reflected marginally in this text, narrative énoncé itself takes on a more prominent role. Unlike Il visconte dimezzato, Il barone rampante has a more precise historical setting. Cosimo's stay begins on June 15th 1767 and the eighteenth century is evoked through historical events and customs, but especially through reference to literary figures of the time and their books. Rousseau, Voltaire and other figures of the Enlightenment populate the novel, creating the intellectual backdrop to Cosimo's exploits, and, in particular, it is the Encyclopédie which acts as the inspiration for Cosimo's enlightened attitude to his fellows and completes the rejection of his feudal heritage. It is through contact with books that Cosimo first enters into history and develops a conception of himself as a historical protagonist.



Cosimo is not the only character whose life is changed through reading, however. His tutor, l'Abbé Fauchelafleur, is imprisoned for possessing proscribed texts which Cosimo had encouraged him to purchase, and more strikingly, the bandit, Gian dei Brughi, having abandoned his life of crime and action to dedicate himself to the pleasures of the novel, is finally captured and hanged. Cosimo contrives to satisfy his obsession by continuing to read to him during his imprisonment and, finally, as he is led to his death, he discovers that the fate of Fielding's hero, Jonathan Wild, is about to parallel his own. This passive renunciation of life and yielding to the pleasures of narrative are rejected by Cosimo, who not only acts on what he has read, but also begins to write and publish himself. The importance of an active notion of the value of literature is suggested by Cosimo's 'quaderni' in which the villagers could write their pleasures and sorrows: 'Ne venne un bel quaderno, e Cosimo lo intitolò "Quaderno della doglianza e della contentezza". Ma quando fu riempito non c'era nessuna assemblea a cui mandarlo, perciò rimase lì, appeso all'albero con uno spago e quando piovve restò a cancellarsi e a infradiciarsi, e questa vista faceva stringere i cuori degli Ombrosotti per la miseria presente e li riempiva di desiderio di rivolta' (239). Here the power of the literary medium is evoked, but the need for a responsive audience is also stressed. The rain-sodden book may well symbolise feelings of revolt amongst the people of Ombrosa, but it is ineffective without an audience to carry its meaning

beyond itself.

Before beginning to write, however, Cosimo had come to know the joy and power of narrating, of creating a story. Biagio consistently demonstrates a high regard for the verisimilitude of narration and warns the reader against the excesses of Cosimo:-

'la storia che ora referirò, fu narrata da Cosimo in molte versioni differenti: mi terrò a quella più ricca di particolari e meno illogica. Se pur è certo che mio fratello raccontando le sue avventure ci aggiungeva molto di sua testa, io, in mancanza d'altre fonti, cerco sempre di tenermi alla lettera di quel che lui diceva' (167-8). Cosimo is more responsive to the demands of his audience and would transform his narrative 'sotto le sollecitazioni del suo uditorio plebeo' (177). This is interesting, for it demonstrates also Calvino's interest in the reader/recipient of the narrative and the way in which their expectations can control the narrative and hence the narrator. The effect of this is that through the tale told, the teller is also transformed, and Cosimo's growing image as folk hero depends as much on what he says, as on what he does. Narrative is shown to be a significant performative medium. The narrator notes moreover that while an increasing degree of fictionality appears to distance the narrator from reality, fiction in turn spawns a genuine return to reality by way of its excesses:

Insomma, gli [Cosimo] era presa quella smania di chi racconta storie e non sa mai se sono più belle quelle che gli sono veramente accadute e

che a rievocarle riportano con sé tutto un mare d'ore passate, di sentimenti minuti, tedii, felicità, incertezze, vanaglorie, nausea di sé, oppure quelle che ci s'inventa, in cui si taglia giù di grosso, e tutto appare facile, ma poi più si svara più ci s'accorge che si torna a parlare delle cose che s'è avuto e capito in realtà vivendo. (178)

Not content merely to narrate his life, Cosimo intersperses his stories with periods of action which in time he returns to relate, but again the paradoxical relationship between life and literature re-emerges. Biagio writes that on his return, Cosimo 'raccontava agli Ombrosotti nuove storie che da vere, raccontandole, diventavano inventate, e da inventate, vere' (178). Thus Cosimo's self comes to be revealed through the act of narration, but it is a self which emerges obliquely through language, and is not expressed directly by it. Cosimo's life develops through his contact with books and through narrative, and experience of one becomes experience of the other. This idea is expressed by Calvino in his preface to Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno,

Le letture e l'esperienza di vita non sono due universi ma uno. Ogni esperienza di vita per essere interpretata chiama certe letture e si fonde con esse. Che i libri nascano sempre da altri libri è una verità solo apparentemente in contraddizione con l'altra; che i libri nascano dalla vita pratica e dai rapporti tra gli uomini.<sup>15</sup>

This merging of life and literature in Il barone rampante is further compounded by the appearance of Tolstoy's Prince Andrei

late in the novel. If the imaginary Cosimo can instigate correspondence with the real historical figures of his time, surely his world can accommodate another character from the world of fiction.

Just as the narrators of Pavese and Bassani aimed to achieve wholeness through narrative, so too, does Cosimo. Life and narrative are similar in that they are both motivated by desire, by the need to effect a reconciliation, even when this task proves impossible. Biagio perceives that in Cosimo's desire to narrate 'c'era un'insoddisfazione più profonda, una mancanza, in quel cercare gente che l'ascoltasse c'era una ricerca diversa. Cosimo non conosceva ancora l'amore, e ogni esperienza, senza quella, che è?' (178-9). Woman as object of desire is always problematic in the work of Calvino. In the introduction to I nostri antenati, Viola, the object of Cosimo's desire, is posited as antithetical to Calvino's hero, for she represents 'a contrasto con la determinatezza illuminista, la spinta barocca e poi romantica verso il tutto che rischia sempre di diventare spinta distruttiva, corsa verso il nulla' (357). Consequently Cosimo's desire has no possibility of satisfying itself and must flounder in the abyss. Viola, the object of Cosimo's desire is constantly in flight. Unlike Cosimo who is constrained by his self-imposed rule not to descend from the trees and whose sense of self comes to depend on the maintenance of this law, Viola is defined by her mobility and, therefore, by her elusiveness.

Cosimo's desire is to arrest this movement and to possess the object, but Viola's excursions into his arboreal domain are brief and provisional, for she refuses to accept Cosimo's law as her own. Consequently, through her refusal to abide by this male stricture, through her refusal to be possessed, she becomes an impossible object. Cosimo seeks a reconfirmation of his subjectivity through the attempted reconciliation of it with the other, represented by Viola. Viola, as subject, however, resists this attempt to redefine her in terms of another's authority.

Cosimo's world can be seen as a realm of pure subjectivity, a totally autonomous construct. Having rejected the 'real' world, Cosimo's flight is initially characterised by a proprietorial desire:- 'Quelle prime giornate di Cosimo sugli alberi non avevano scopi o programmi ma erano dominate soltanto dal desiderio di conoscere e possedere quel suo regno' (112). It is not enough for Cosimo to possess this dimension of pure subjectivity, for he must be seen to possess it by others. Consequently, this relationship with others redefines the nature of this realm which can no longer be said to be autonomous. A dialectical process of identification is set in motion, but it is a process which can never result in a material product, for its relationships are constantly being modified. In order to overcome this dilemma which prevents the subject's full recognition by the other, Cosimo must somehow integrate the Other into this imaginary domaine. The Other resents such enforced enclosure and indeed cannot be thus enclosed. The object refuses

to supplement the loss, hence the subject remains prey to an unfulfilled, unfulfillable desire.

The connection between sexual desire and narrative desire has already been noted. Does the impossible conquest and possession of the former therefore entail a similar defeat for the latter? A reading of Il barone rampante would seem to lead to such a conclusion. The narrator of the novel indicates the destructive power of language over the subject when he remarks: 'le imprese che si basano su di una tenacia interiore devono essere mute e oscure, per poco uno le dichiara o se ne glori, tutto appare fatuo, senza senso o addirittura meschino' (109). It has also been seen how the act of narrating itself falsifies life, and how, at best, life can only be refracted indirectly through the narrative. The final pages of the novel, however, demonstrate an awareness of the annihilatory power of language at an even more acute level. The loss felt by the narrator after the death of Cosimo cannot be restored through the construction of his biography. The physical presence of the word cannot accommodate a presence other than its own. Attention is drawn to the materiality of the text by the narrator who writes: 'ogni tanto scrivendo m'interrompo e vado alla finestra' (260), and in the end it seems that the only material presence which the text can recall is itself as a graphic sign pointing to nothing but itself:-

Ombrosa non c'è più. Guardando il cielo

sgombro, mi domando se davvero è esistita. Quel frastaglio di rami e foglie, biforcazioni, lobi, spiumi, minuto e senza fine, e il cielo solo a sprazzi irregolari e ritagli, forse c'era solo perché ci passasse mio fratello col suo leggero passo di codibugnolo, era un ricamo fatto sul nulla che assomiglia a questo filo d'inchiostro, come l'ho lasciato correre per pagine a pagine, zeppo di cancellature, di rimandi, di sgorbi nervosi, di macchie, di lacune, che a momenti si sgrana in grossi acini chiari a momenti si infittisce in segni minuscoli come semi puntiformi, ora si ritorce su se stesso, ora si biforca, ora collega grumi di frasi con contorni di foglie o di nuvole, e poi s'intoppa, e poi ripiglia a attorcigliarsi, e corre e corre e si sdipana e avvolge un ultimo grappolo insensato di parole idee sogni ed è finito. (261)

All that language can offer is the presence of the word.

The object of narrative becomes the subject, and it is the desire to make present the subject which motivates narrative. The failure to achieve this aim results in narrative being forced to address itself and its own material image. Language and narrative are no longer the media through which the subject is (mis)represented, but come to signify an absolute dislocation between subject and textual identity. The only escape is perhaps through the resemblance which the trees of Ombrosa bear to the graphic presence of the narrative, although paradoxically both are (mis)represented through discourse. Just as we do not see the trees, neither too, do we see the actual smudges and lines of the narrator's text. The final section of the novel consists of a self-reflexive discourse which points only to itself. Having testified to the failure of narrative to evoke the presence of anything other than itself, is the only solution recourse to a



metanarrative which might seek to re-establish the presence of the subject through the overt avowal of its own structures? Can the link between life and literature be located through the storytelling rather than through the story told?

Linda Hutcheon in Narcissistic Narrative argues that the modern tendency towards metafiction constitutes a reworking of the mimetic tradition rather than a rejection of it.<sup>16</sup> By exposing its own artifice, metafiction may undermine the Realist intent, but it assures for itself a mimetic impulse by insisting on the fact that writing and, consequently, reading belong to life as much as to art. She writes 'The novel is not a copy of the empirical world nor does it stand in opposition to it. It is rather a continuation of that ordering, fiction-making process that is part of our normal coming to terms with experience' (89). By insisting on the idea of process rather than product to encapsulate the notion of narrative and life, Hutcheon demonstrates how metanarrative can, and does, possess a mimetic intention. The destruction of the relationship between fiction and an extratextual referent does not impede the identification between art and life at the level of storytelling. Language becomes both the means and the end of metafictional narrative. We can only make sense of life through language, a process which mirrors the literary project of reading and writing. This idea which had been figured mainly on the level of content in Il barone rampante appears in Il cavaliere inesistente as a major

structural device.<sup>17</sup>

The third part of Calvino's trilogy may not be considered a first person text within the typology of traditional critics such as Romberg. Suor Teodora, the narrator, does not share the fictive universe of her characters and, therefore, her role would be seen as authorial rather than narratorial. This claim can be refuted on two points. The ending of the novel in which Suor Teodora is revealed to be Bradamante introduces the narrator into the world of her characters, but more importantly, it can be argued that the main interest of Il cavaliere inesistente lies not with Agilulfo and the other knights, but with Suor Teodora's act of narration itself. She posits an existential link between herself and her narrative by virtue of being its creator.<sup>18</sup>

The story of Agilulfo and the knights of Charlemagne has already been well developed by the time Suor Teodora first intervenes directly in the narrative. The quasi-historical setting has been undermined by the existence of the non-existent knight and the narrative's authority lies in its own internal consistency and logic, rather than in its reference to 'real life'. It is, as we later learn, a world in which life had not yet been entirely encoded by language:- 'ancora confuso era lo stato delle cose del mondo, nell'Evo in cui questa storia si svolge. Non era raro imbattersi in nomi e pensieri e forme e istituzioni cui non corrispondeva nulla d'esistente.' (284) This

suggests the notion of a pre-linguistic Arcadia where life is greater than linguistic form.<sup>19</sup>

Suor Teodora's intervention at the beginning of the fourth chapter disrupts the narrative in the same way in which any authorial intrusion would, but is surprising on account of the degree of embodiment which accompanies this intrusion. We read 'Io che racconto questa storia sono Suor Teodora, religiosa dell'ordine di San Colombano. Scrivo in convento, desumendo da vecchie carte, da chiacchiere sentite in parlatorio e da qualche rara testimonianza di gente che c'era' (285). Thus we have the first image of the 'monaca scrivana' and it is important to stress both aspects of this image. As a nun, the narrator represents a high degree of otherness, perhaps exemplifying the idea of a non-desiring subject having renounced all worldly attractions. Secondly, the image of the scribe is significant, for it intimates the work of a copier and not a creator. The narrative is, as a result, told through rather than by Suor Teodora. She cites her sources which are both literary and testimonial, but importantly both are linguistic. Her position is one of a second degree narrator. She goes on to ironise her own position as one who narrates about life, but who has little experience of it, yet the point she finally makes is this:-

'l'arte di scrivere storie sta nel saper tirar fuori da quel nulla che si è capito della vita tutto il resto; ma finita la pagina si riprende la vita e ci s'accorge che quel che si sapeva è

proprio un nulla' (300). To put life into literature is to attempt the impossible, for one can only imitate its processes, and it is with this imitation that its mimetic possibilities lie.

The act of writing is also revealed as a material and time consuming process. Suor Teodora writes as a penance, her writing is an act of contrition in which all of life's labours are seen as one. Writing is restitution. It is an onerous activity which is conditioned not by the limits of imagination, but by the material conditions under which she writes:-

'Sotto la mia cella è la cucina del convento. Mentre scrivo, sento l'acciottolio dei piatti di rame e stagno: le sorelle sguattere stanno sciaquando le stoviglie del nostro magro refettorio... Ieri scrivevo della battaglia e nell'acciottolio dell'acquaio mi pareva di sentir cozzare lance contro scudi e corazze...e così quello che le mie orecchie udivano, i miei occhi socchiusi trasformavano in visioni e le mie labbra silenziose in parole e parole e la penna si lanciava per il foglio bianco a rincorrerle.' (294).<sup>20</sup>

Life is transcribed metaphorically into the text, determined by the conditions of its production. Writing is not an autonomous activity, but like all activities is dependent on its historical situation for its realisation. The temporal reference 'ieri' also demonstrates the way in which narrative conceals the nature of its own performance by excluding information which would reveal itself as a durative process. For the writer, writing takes place in time, but the labour is not normally perceived. Suor Teodora's reference to the previous day's writing highlights the temporal separation between the narrative we read with its

own temporal co-ordinates, and the time of writing itself.<sup>21</sup>

The material nature of the narrative act also comes to bear on the question of desire in narrative. It is possible to equate narrative desire with Suor Teodora's task of penance, for both seek fulfillment and cessation through the completion of the narrative, through its closure, but at times the narrator tells of how the physical imprint of the narrative is heavier than its transcendental, liberating effect. She notes:

Ci si mette a scrivere di lena ma c'è un'ora in cui la penna non gratta che polveroso inchiostro, e non vi scorre più una goccia di vita, e la vita è tutto fuori, fuori dalla finestra, fuori di te, e ti sembra che mai più potrai rifugiarti nella pagina che scrivi, aprire un altro mondo, fare il salto. Forse è meglio così: forse quando scrivevi con gioia, non era miracolo né grazia: era peccato, idolatria, superbia. Ne sono fuori, allora? No, scrivendo non mi sono cambiata in bene: ho solo consumato un po' d'ansiosa incosciente giovinezza. Che mi varranno queste pagine scontente? Il libro, il voto, non varrà più di quanto tu vali. Che ci si salvi l'anima scrivendo non è detto. Scrivi, scrivi, e già la tua anima è persa. (307)

Writing is an act of renunciation which is undertaken in the hope of restoring to the subject that which she has lost, but the value of this is put in doubt, as writing becomes more and more closely associated with 'la penna' and 'la pagina bianca', and the 'verità' which the narrator seeks to discover constantly recedes in the chase over the white pages, which seem to offer the promise of the desired object, but which, in fact, serve only as lures in the never-ending chase.

The impossibility of the narrative ever attaining its object, and the frustration which this results in, lead the narrator to adopt graphic means in order to further her narrative. Instead of narrating, she begins to draw lines on the paper to indicate the paths which the knights travel, and pictures to represent the places where they go. This shift from a linguistic to a non-linguistic signifier cannot alter the fact that the presence of the sign irrevocably denotes the absence of that which it stands for.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the narrator resorts to the use of the arrow to combat the abyss discerned between life and the blank page, but as Jo Ann Cannon points out: 'The recourse to the arrow merely confirms the inability of signs to be anything other than indicators: the arrow is in fact a sign par excellence, representing a movement toward something else.' (45) It is a testament of the failure to represent desire in language, desire which is felt through movement towards its object and likewise is experienced as absence.

Paradoxically, the signs which the narrator chooses to adopt are not reproduced graphically in the text, but are themselves indexed by linguistic signs. We are told of the signs, but they are themselves absent. Richard Andrews argues that by writing about signs, Calvino has breached the impasse perceived by Suor Teodora:

Words and signs, it is true, have no intrinsic



meaning but nor does the world as a whole - until it is selectively interpreted into words and signs.... The impossibility of writing is successfully written about. To watch a story being composed, to be aware of the conscious and arbitrary choices involved, turns out neither to obscure the story nor to make it insignificant. Rather the story becomes doubly interesting - as an event described, and as an artefact which describes it.<sup>23</sup>

This assertion would appear to be supported by the conclusion of the novel itself when life and literature are almost miraculously reunited, as Suor Teodora reveals herself to be Bradamante and finds her happy ending with Rambaldo. Cannon remarks: 'this *deus ex machina* ending becomes a metaphor for the desired reconciliation of fiction and the external world' (46). Such an ending cannot evoke a sense of closure for the 'desired reconciliation' does not engage with the issues which the text has broached. Cannon concludes: 'regardless of the author's intentions, the conciliatory conclusion is overshadowed by the evidence of the text itself: the "segni alfabetici" and the "complessità della vita" remain distinct' (47).

Having called the value of the signifier into doubt, the dilemma cannot be resolved through the use of the same process of signification. The narrative, which has been constructed through a series of arbitrary choices, cannot be closed through the arbitrary identification of the narrator with one of her protagonists. Calvino's strategy which seeks to transform process into product belies his own argument. Also the cessation



of desire achieved through Bradamante/Suor Teodora's abandonment of the imaginary signifier, ie Agilulfo/the word in favour of Rambaldo, the male subject/life, is merely the transfer of desire from one signifier to another, and does not result in evoking the presence of the signified. The reconciliation effected by Suor Teodora between life and literature when she writes: 'la pagina ha il suo bene solo quando la volti e c'è la vita dietro che spinge e scompiglia tutti i fogli del libro' (350), operates only on the level of the plot and only at the expense of the medium through which the plot is expressed. This assertion reveals a wish to ignore the material dimension of the signifier, and identify solely with the desire which propels the medium. The narrator becomes the desire by becoming part of the plot and renouncing all notion of authority as the subject of the 'énonciation'. The author, figured in the persona of Suor Teodora, consciously surrenders to the plethora of signs constructed by the text, accepting the absence which the sign implicitly bears.

In his essay 'What is an author?', Michel Foucault discusses what he considers to be two of the major themes of contemporary writing.<sup>24</sup> Firstly, he notes that 'today's writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression' (142) with the result that it is a strategy concerned with the signifier, rather than with the signified content. He concludes: 'in writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it

to pin a subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.' Secondly, Foucault discusses the relationship between writing and death. He argues that contemporary writing subverts the tradition which sought to 'perpetuate the immortality of the hero' i.e. the idea of narrative as redemption by conceptualising narrative as a sacrifice. He writes: 'it (writing) is now a voluntary effacement which does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer's very existence. The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer'. This is compounded by the fact that writing cannot individualise the author. Foucault concludes: 'the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing' (143).

Foucault's ideas are relevant here because both Suor Teodora and Biagio are figured as authors, and both experience the dilemma outlined by Foucault. The crisis is not confronted by Biagio until the final passages of his narrative. Effectively, he has been writing in order to perpetuate the life of his brother through narrative, but he finally realises that the written word does not ensure immortality, but is the definitive stamp of death. Cosimo's absence is intensified through the confrontation with the text as a purely graphic sign, and Cosimo,

as sign, thus signifies pure absence. In the end, all that the written word can represent is its own materiality. Biagio's task is not unlike that of Scheherazade who wards off death every night by telling a story. Biagio, however, ultimately runs out of plots, and the narrative which signals the death of Cosimo, necessarily entails the death of his author. The text becomes a testament to his own demise.

While Il barone rampante ends at the moment of crisis, in Il cavaliere inesistente the crisis seems to have been overcome. Suor Teodora not only experiences the alienation of the signifier from the signified, but also the dislocation effected between the sign and its producer. Her association is one of pure materiality, as she chases the pen over the page, in its ceaseless momentum from signifier to signifier. The resolution of this conflict, in which she assumes herself as a textual signifier in the figure of Bradamante, signals the end of authorship. Indeed she becomes an intertextual signifier denoting pure literariness, for Bradamante is a sign which refers only to other books, as the heroine of the romance.<sup>25</sup> The resolution becomes, in effect, a kind of suicide as she accepts the inevitability of her disappearance. Like Agilulfo, whose identity is constructed by his own intention, but whose death is caused by his failure to signify within the discourse of the other once Sofronia is (mistakenly) discovered not to have been a virgin, Suor Teodora's identity is dependent on its place in

discourse. It is constructed at a point created through the interplay of signs. Her surrender to the narrative is a recognition that the author cannot escape death by baring the bones of his narrative and by trying to introduce his presence by the back door. To write that one is writing inevitably entails the fact that one is written. Patricia Waugh in Metafiction writes:

A last, desperate strategy before the game is handed over entirely to language is to admit that one is telling a story, creating an alternative world. Such an admission functions, however, merely to assert more emphatically that 'one' exists, 'one' is the source of this world, 'one' is an author. However, once 'one' is recognised as itself a construction produced through textual relationships, then worlds, texts, and authors are subsumed by language.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of this, it is somewhat paradoxical for Calvino to assert that Il cavaliere inesistente represents 'la conquista dell'essere'. This conquest can only function at the level of the plot, but as has been demonstrated, the plot is only the result of a succession of arbitrary choices whose logic and referentiality point to nothing but its construction as a product of discourse. The link between life and literature which had been said to exist at the level of story-telling is shown to be a form of perdition as the subject's position as producer of discourse is rendered untenable.

At this stage, it is important to make a distinction between the narrators of Bassani and Pavese and the author/narrators of

Calvino's Trilogy. In the first instance, the narrators of Pavese and Bassani are conceived of in the fiction as historical subjects whose biography is constructed in a phase subsequent to their life experience. We have seen how as subjects they are constructed as products of discourse, but an essential part of the fictional autobiography is that history necessarily precedes its rendering into discourse. Their subjectivity is dependant upon a supposedly historical reference. Conversely, in the Trilogy this hierarchy is reversed. The shift from a realist to a fantastic mode, and the conscious figuring of the narrators in terms of their otherness, undermines the realist motivation of the first person text. Here, the producers of discourse are never posited as being anything more than discursive entities who participate in an avowedly fictional world. All sense of referentiality to an exterior world is conspicuously abandoned. What we see unfolding is a discourse which consciously precedes 'histoire' and which therefore adopts preeminence over it.

The result of Calvino's progressive abandonment of the fiction of the narrator, as an historical referent, results in attention being focussed solely on the narrator as the embodiment of the narrative function. Teresa de Lauretis writes: 'The narrator has no function in relation to action development, nor is she there to favour the author's identification or to provide a specific point of view. On the contrary her voice is totally outside the narrative context and is thus capable of attracting

the attention to the very act of narrating as discourse, that is, creation by means of language and to the structuring process of writing (*écriture*)' (416). A gap is created between author and narrator as all notions of verisimilitude are subverted and the narrator is shown to be uniquely a textual voice. De Lauretis continues: 'As the narrators become more and more anonymous, pure literary personae, so is discourse increasingly detached from and finally deprived of any narrative support proper' (417). The idea of a narrating consciousness has been reduced to a narrative function. The narrators of Pavese and Bassani and their narratives are engaged in a mutually validating system of authentication by virtue of their claims to an historical existence. Calvino rejects this fictional projection to demonstrate the priority of discourse and the narrative function. The verisimilar code which regulates first person narrative is openly flaunted by Calvino, who exposes the code as nothing more than a textual strategy designed to uphold the authoritative mystique. The fusion of the figures of Bradamante and Suor Teodora is a recognition that the attempt to assert authorial authority over the text by entering into its level of discourse inevitably leads to the author becoming a textual property, part of the textual fiction.

By making the role of the narrator/author an overt part of the fiction, Calvino succeeds, almost despite himself, in dismantling the concept of the author as the sole authority for

the discourse. The narrative can no longer be seen as the property of one being, for the text constantly refers not to this supposed origin but to itself as text and to other texts. In this context, Calvino's adoption of the medieval romance as a point of reference is not casual.<sup>27</sup> The romance consists of a conscious reworking of already known situations with familiar characters and displays a high degree of intertextuality. Born of an oral tradition in which the I who recited the tale laid no claim to proprietorial rights over the narrative, the text was, in a sense, public property, and its authority lay not with its 'spokesman', but with its own tradition. Two other features seem to characterise the romance. Firstly, it is a narrative of action, its appeal lying in the tale well told and the constant renewal of narrative desire as episode follows episode. Secondly it lends itself to an allegorical interpretation, with the quest for identity occupying an important position.<sup>28</sup> In the introduction to the Trilogy, Calvino seems to adopt all three facets of the tradition, which, it might be argued, is anachronistic in this century. He does so, however, not to flee reality but in order to question it. The constant subversion of the reader's genre expectations both in terms of the novel and of the romance force a confrontation with the narrative as a textual construct.<sup>29</sup>

As has already been noted, the fantastic can only function when read in terms of the real, for it owes its otherness to this



implied norm. The image which it reflects, however, is then re-read, and it is through the creation of this gap that fantasy works on the preconceived reality. The trilogy works to undermine the notion of the I-narrator/author as anything other than a textual voice. The struggle between the subject and the word/discourse can only be resolved, it seems, through the subject's surrendering to discourse, and through his acceptance of the self as a sign amongst signs. While, on the one hand, this signals the death of the author, it does not necessarily entail the death of the subject. It does, however, suggest that the construction of narrative alone does not compensate for the subject's lack, for narrative by its very nature is not whole, but is in itself a sign amongst signs whose meaning undergoes continual reformation. While this notion is implicit in the works of Pavese and of Bassani, it is overtly foregrounded in Calvino's trilogy. The solution which seems to be proposed is that the subject should not try to seek confirmation of a self which can only be constituted as a sign, but should enter into the game of language and accept its mobility. The alternative is death, the realm of non-signification.

Barthes has written '*Le Roman est une Mort; il fait de la vie un destin, du souvenir un acte utile et de la durée un temps dirigé et significatif*'.<sup>30</sup> The anti-realist novel challenges death by its refusal to accept an empirical referent, and by a rejection of the narrative structures which would close its

meaning. Calvino's texts subvert the quest for wholeness and belie the intention to conquer discourse by the adoption of a ludic metanarrative. The conciliatory solution proposed in Il cavaliere inesistente perhaps betrays the fiction-making process and its priority over the historical subject, but at the same time reveals its power to refuse closure by predicting the beginning of further tales to tell. The text refuses to end, and thus disputes the death of the subject. It seeks to harness the structures of desire generated by the other and appropriate them for itself. It is an assertion of the self as master of the ludic structure of narrative.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. In Anna Dolfi, Le forme del sentimento, (Padua, 1981), pp.79-91, (p.83).
2. Italo Calvino, I nostri antenati, p.353.
3. Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, (London, 1981), p.3.
4. Ferdinando Camon, Il mestiere di scrittore, (Milan, 1973), pp.181-201, (p.183).
5. For Calvino's own views on the relationship between literature and the world see his collection of essays, Una pietra sopra, (Turin, 1980) esp. 'Il midollo del leone', 'Il mare dell'oggettività', 'La sfida al labirinto' and the later 'I livelli della realtà in letteratura'. Written at different times they offer a useful insight into the development of Calvino's thought. See also Teresa de Lauretis, 'Narrative Discourse in Calvino: Praxis or Poiesis', PMLA, 90 (1975), 414-425.
6. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, (London, 1983), p.5.
7. Italo Calvino, 'Cibernetica e fantasmi (Appunti sulla narrativa come processo combinatorio)' in Una pietra sopra, pp.164-181.
8. For a discussion of the role of the various narrators in the Trilogy, see J.R. Woodhouse, Italo Calvino: A Reappraisal and an Appreciation of the Trilogy, (Hull, 1968), pp.58-70.
9. Both Woodhouse (pp.64-65) and de Lauretis (p.416) insist that Biagio, the narrator of Il barone rampante, is still a child at the time of narration. Patently this is not the case.
10. See Gregory L. Lucente, 'An Interview with Italo Calvino', in Contemporary Literature, vol 26 no.3 (1984) pp.245-253. Here Calvino reiterates his views on the impossibility of 'objective' representation in literature.
11. M.M. Bakhtin in 'Discourse in the Novel', The Dialogic Imagination, edited by M. Holquist, (Texas, 1981) pp.259-422 gives an interesting account of the function of narrators defined as 'other'. See esp. p.313.

12. Italo Calvino, Le cosmicomiche, (Turin, 1965). For a detailed account of the function of the narrator in these short stories see Jo Ann Cannon, Italo Calvino: Writer and Critic, (Ravenna, 1981) pp.49-64 and Contardo Calligaris, Italo Calvino, (Milan, 1973), pp.91-98. Latterly, Calvino has also alluded to the alleged anthropomorphism of these stories in his essay 'Visibilità' in Lezioni americane: sei proposte per il prossimo millennio, (Milan, 1988) p.90.
13. Calligaris writes: 'la forma spezzata non è riproduzione dell'alienazione, ma coscienza di questa tutta tesa alla conquista di una nuova integralità', (p.36).
14. See Calvino's note to the Trilogy, pp.355-356.
15. Calvino, Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno (Turin, 1964), p.15.
16. Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox, (London, 1984).
17. Cannon notes: 'Il barone rampante occupies a pivotal position in the trilogy: while on the one hand, the novel thematizes the efficacy of literature, on the other hand, it begins to expose the unreality of literary language', (p.42).
18. See de Lauretis, pp.416-417.
19. See also Calvino, 'Cibenetica e fantasmi', for the writer's views on the relationship between language and the world, the said and the unsaid.
20. Calvino's effect here is obviously humorous but for a more disturbing account of similar phenomena in 'genuine' confessional writing see Giovanni Pozzi, 'Il "parere" autobiografico di Veronica Giuliani', in Strumenti Critici, 2, no.54, (1987), 161-192.
21. For a discussion of the various techniques of 'mise en abyme' see Lucien Dällenbach, Le récit spéculaire: essai sur la mise en abyme, (Paris, 1977).
22. See Calvino 'La penna in prima persona (Per i disegni di Saul Steinberg)' in Una pietra sopra pp.294-300 for the author's views on the sign in graphic art.
23. Richard Andrews, 'Italo Calvino' in Writers and Society in Contemporary Italy, edited by Michael Caesar and Peter Hainsworth, (Leamington Spa, 1984), pp.259-281, (p.266).
24. Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?' in Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism, edited by Josué V. Harari, (Ithaca, 1979), pp.141-160.

25. For Calvino's comments on the self-referential nature of the romance see the introduction to his version of Orlando Furioso, (Turin, 1970) pp.IX-XXVI.
26. Patricia Waugh, Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction, (London, 1984), p.130.
27. See note 25, above.
28. See Calligaris pp.39-51 for a discussion of the Trilogy as allegory.
29. Robert Alter in Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre, (Berkeley, 1975) makes an interesting observation on the birth of the novel genre. He writes: 'the novel begins out of an erosion of belief in the authority of the written word and it begins with Cervantes. It fittingly takes as the initial target of its literary critique the first genre to have enjoyed popular success because of the printing press - the Renaissance chivalric romance' (3).
30. Roland Barthes, Le degré zéro de l'écriture, (Paris, 1953). Interestingly in his introduction to Fiabe italiane, (Turin, 1956) Calvino writes that these fables: 'sono, prese tutte insieme, nella loro sempre ripetuta e sempre varia casistica di vicende umane, una spiegazione generale della vita, nata in tempi remoti e serbata nel lento ruminio delle coscienze contadine fino a noi; sono il catalogo dei destini che possono darsi a un uomo e a una donna, soprattutto per la parte di vita che appunto è il farsi d'un destino', (p.xii).

## CHAPTER SIX

Strategies of Mastery - Il castello dei destini incrociati and Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore

The transition which is witnessed through the course of the Trilogy, from interest in the 'vissuto' to interest in the act of narration itself, is carried further in Il castello dei destini incrociati, and its companion La taverna dei destini incrociati. We have seen the way in which the hierarchy of lived experience and narrative experience was reversed, by the manipulative hand of Suor Teodora, who demonstrated the precedence of narrative ordering in attributing significance and form to a disorderly past. Authority has been seen to lie with the language of narrative and not with the events which supposedly precede it, and the authority of the narrator is due to a privileged, albeit restricted, relationship with the linguistic reconstruction of experience which permits the production of the subject as narrator, as much as it allows the production of 'her' narrative.<sup>1</sup> The idea of possession itself is seen to be an illusory image of control over the system of signs, for the system necessarily exists prior to the subject's entry into it. Calvino's later work emphasises the precarious nature of this possession, and underlines the incomplete nature of the subject's relationship with the narrative system, demonstrating the inevitable lack experienced by the subject in narrative.

If the Trilogy can be said to be set in a fantastic-historical realm, the setting of Il castello and its companion piece seems to elude the element of historical referentiality completely, replacing it with a set of co-ordinates which refer only to the literary experience itself. Both are set in a kind of lost demesne in the midst of a dark forest. In the first book, the narrator arrives at the castle by crossing a drawbridge. He dismounts from his horse and then enters the castle which is already thronged with other travellers. Crossing the wood has been fraught with danger for the traveller, and his sense of weariness and confusion is only added to by his entry into the castle. He is immediately confronted by two diverse aspects of the setting and cannot decide which predominates, unable to assimilate the meaning of what he sees before him. The great hall into which the traveller enters, has both the aspect of a royal court and that of a 'locanda di passo'.<sup>2</sup> Either the court has fallen into decline and taken on the customs of a wayside inn, or the inn has gradually adopted some of the customs of a refined lifestyle. This mystery is never resolved, but remains open with possibilities.

To add to the traveller's sense of disorientation, he realises that everyone in the great hall, including himself, has been struck dumb. Thus a fundamental human need has been frustrated: that of communication. Traditionally, the wayside inn was a place where people met in order to exchange their



experiences, to tell their own tales, and likewise travellers were amongst the keenest storytellers of all. Deprived of the power of speech, the travellers must resort to other means in order to tell their tales, and the way out of this impasse is provided by a pack of tarot cards. The pattern is set thus:

Uno dei commensali tirò a sè le carte sparse,  
lasciando sgombra una larga parte del tavolo;  
ma non le radunò in mazzo né le mescolò; prese  
una carta e la posò davanti a sé. Tutti  
notammo la somiglianza tra il suo viso e quello  
della figura, e ci parve di capire che con  
quella carta egli voleva dire 'io' e che  
s'accingeva a raccontare la sua storia.(6)

Having identified himself with the first card, the traveller goes on to tell his story by choosing other cards and placing them in a linear sequence in order to form his narrative.<sup>3</sup> The first person narrator's subsequent narration is, in fact, a narrativised reading of this and the stories which follow. As we shall see, this is not an unproblematic procedure.

The cards are of a highly intricate and ornate design, themselves the work of a skilled craftsman. Placed alongside the narrator's own text to produce the effect of a dual narration, we, the readers of the printed text, may fail to perceive the subtleties of their design, with the result that part of their narrative becomes disseminated and lost due to the vagaries of the printed medium of reproduction. The cards themselves are, as Maria Corti points out, divided into two separate categories, i.e. 'carte-soggetti' and 'carte-predicati'. The former refers to the face cards which are used to represent 'characters' in the

tales, while the latter group symbolically conveys the action. One of the principal functions of the first group is to provide a set of ideal images or egos with which each narrator can identify and select the appropriate image from this range of possibilities. The range is obviously limited, however, so in effect when each narrator says 'I' and identifies with a particular image, he is necessarily compromising his individuality in order to adopt a position which will permit him to enter into the narrative role. Thus while the 'carte-soggetti' provide a necessary element of identification for the subject, they also delineate the point of separation and alienation between the self and the narrating subject. By adopting the role of narrative subject, the self must necessarily effect a choice which is not of his own making. He is not the origin of his own story. Similarly, once this choice has been made, the narrator can only develop his story with the aid of the signs which are available to him. Consequently, this means that only certain things may be said, and what these are, depends not on the narrator, but on what the system of signs offers to him.<sup>4</sup> As he progresses along the narrative chain, each card takes him further and further away from his own story.

To use a pack of tarot cards as a narrative medium for recounting the past would seem to indicate a radical departure from the traditional uses to which the cards have been put. The cards would normally be used either to predict the future, or

simply, for the purpose of playing a game. However, these dimensions are not entirely absent from the function which they fulfil in the text. In order to predict the future, the reader of the cards must construct a narrative exploiting, on the one hand, the traditional wisdom of interpreting the cards, and on the other, bringing to bear a personal intuitive gift in order to attribute specific signification. It is, however, a narrative of possibility which emerges, as the future is as yet uncertain, but again it is the narrative act which constructs this realm of possibility, in the same way as another narrative predicates a narrative of the past. In predicting the future, the reader of the cards selects one series of possibilities from the many, but this choice inevitably involves a rejection of the other eventualities which might befall. However, because the events predicated have not yet occurred the structure of their narrative remains much more open, for at the moment of narration there can be no recourse to history in order to substantiate their authenticity.

The narrator of the future unleashes a series of possibilities which engage the imagination alone, suggesting a multitude of readings beneath the cryptic signs proffered by the cartomancer. The cards are complex signs, for they are polysemantic and reject any attempt to subjugate the richness of this multiplicity of meaning. The cards have no absolute univocal meaning and are indeed meaningless, if deprived of a

wider narrative support. Calvino in his note to the text writes: 'ho ritenuto soprattutto l'idea che il significato d'ogni singola carta dipende dal posto che essa ha nella successione di carte che la precedono e la seguono' (124). Thus it emerges that while some cards e.g. 'il Sole' may possess a literal, iconic meaning, their semantic potential can only be realised in the combinatory process which is narrative.<sup>5</sup> The nameless first person narrator of the text is thus placed in a similar position to that of the fortune-teller. Not only is he the narrator of the text which we read, he is also the reader of the various narratives which form the text. Consequently, the two apparently contradictory functions merge, as it becomes clear that every narrative is inevitably a primary reading, and the primacy of the former over the latter is reversed.<sup>6</sup>

From the beginning, it is clear that the narrator is engaged in an activity which can only reveal a literature of possibility and not of historical certainty. He offers us a reading of the cards but his narrative indicates the provisional nature of this reading as one interpretation amongst many. Having seen the opening sequence of cards relating the first story, he writes: 'dunque l'inizio della storia poteva essere questo' (8), indicating his uncertainty in the act of reading. As to the meaning of the 'Due di Coppe', he suggests that it might represent 'un indizio più che probabile d'un incontro amoroso' (9). When 'Il Sole' is laid on the table, he speculates that

'forse più che sul significato allegorico della figura conveniva soffermarsi su quello letterale' (11). He then ponders 'la soluzione dell'enigma' (11), and concludes, when faced with the opacity of the narrative, 'non ci restava che azzardare delle congetture' (12).

The narrator's use of the conditional tense throughout underlines that reading is merely the selection of a series of possibilities, and that this selection, inevitably, entails the rejection of a number of equally valid interpretations. The reader works, not only to construct a linear logic linking the cards, but also fleshes out and amplifies the story. The narrator imagines dialogue between the participants of the tales and suggests alternative endings to the story. What we witness, is the reader as an active fabulator and not a passive recipient of the narrating voice. The reader actively anticipates the next card in the sequence - 'ora ci racconterà il duello' (12) - but is also subject to the strategy of the narrator who may choose to toy with the reader's desire to know what happened next. The gestures of the narrators (again lost to us readers of the text) accompany the laying down of the cards, as if to accentuate the tension and revitalise the anecdote.

Each narrator exhibits different traits which, in turn, demand a different response from the reader. When Faust tells his tale, a literal interpretation is made difficult 'per il modo

di raccontare dell'alchimista, sempre ellittico e allusivo' (19). Thus the narrator and his audience become engaged in a struggle to elicit meaning from the cards which are opaque, on account of the very plethora of possible meanings which they suggest, but refuse to render. The iconic nature of each card suggests a meaning which is subsequently amended and modified by the cards which follow, thus subjecting each reading to a re-reading, and more significantly, to a constant deferral of meaning. This deferral of meaning is similar to the deferral necessitated by the attempt to look into the future, for it allows a limitless free play from one signifier to another, where all meanings are possible, and whatever is rejected, can always be retrieved.

The element of play which is suggested by the cards is also incorporated into the structure of the text. Card games may largely be regarded as pastimes, and indeed in Il castello one of the main functions of the storytelling activity is to allow the travellers to consume the period of waiting before re-embarking on their journeys, just as Scheherazade, perhaps the greatest storyteller of all, is dependent on this quality in order to gain time for herself. The story itself, however, inhabits a curiously atemporal zone, just like that of a card game, for although the context in which both take place may change, both are capable of infinite repetition, and consequently, infinite sameness. Both have other features in common. While one may play cards, the nature of the game is, in no way, anarchic. Card

games are highly formalised and channel the desire for play in specific ways, according to specific rules. Each card has a value, but the value is not inherent to the card: it is dependent on the place attributed to it within the game. Likewise, each player participates only according to the possibilities offered by the rules of the game, and can adopt only the positions offered to him by the game. His self is lost to the role of player.<sup>7</sup> Thus the narrators too obey the rules of narrative established by the first narrator, as they all commence by nominating a card to represent themselves, and go on by following the pre-established pattern.

The tarot cards are the language which the narrators use, and the narrative grammar is composed by means of the linear and symmetrical patterning of the cards. While each player must obey the rules of the game, there nevertheless remains some scope for the player to develop an individual strategy. This degree of choice is paralleled in the construction of the narratives, as each narrator can choose the cards which he wishes to represent his tale. Bernardini Napoletano writes:

'I tarocchi sono perciò i segni della langue,  
il mezzo di comunicazione; nella parole si  
attua lo sforzo individuale di dare un ordine  
al disordine della natura entro, una struttura  
logica, il quadrato della 'raccontabilità' in  
cui confluiscono tutti i racconti e gli ordini  
possibili, trasformando la natura attraverso  
l'espressione in mondo, cioè civiltà.<sup>8</sup>

The order, which permits individual expression within a socially



defined context, proves to be both the starting point and the end of narrative possibilities. Once all the cards have been used and laid on the table, their geometrical symmetry appears before us, but although all the signs have been displayed, the fullness of their meaning has not been achieved, for having been read, they can now be re-read and re-interpreted according to their position in the final schema. The provisional nature of this apparently definitive structure is most fully demonstrated as the landlady of the castle, having reached the end of the game reaches for the cards: 'allora le sue mani sparpagliano le carte, mescolano il mazzo, ricominciano da capo' (48). Like all games, the game of narrative can constantly renew itself and produce new variations within the structures furnished by its rules, but it does so on the basis of its combinative possibilities and on the inexhaustibility of its readings. It is the form of the game which permits this, and not the uniqueness of the players.<sup>9</sup>

One of the features which allows the success in the development of the narrative structure in Il castello is the acceptance of the rule of chance in the game. After the opening tale, each story is built out of the 'affiancamenti casuali' of two cards and each player/narrator happily builds his narrative out of this chance encounter and the remaining cards. In La taverna, however, possession of the cards is more fiercely contested, as each narrator must fight to take hold of each card

and protect it, from the grasping hands of his fellow narrators. This desire for mastery entails the destruction of the symmetrical pattern achieved in Il castello, for cards appear and re-appear in various places out of sequence. The 'grammar', which would structure the whole, disintegrates as the rules are constantly violated and the symmetry of the structure collapses. Bernardini Napoletano writes: 'I tarocchi, non più segni con cui istituire una grammatica sono diventati le rappresentazioni sparse dell'esperienza vissuta e della realtà, non più strutturabile' (150). The dissolution of the structure seems to entail the incapacity of the structure to enclose the demands of experience. The void at the centre of the final pattern in La taverna is suggestive of the existential abyss over which the structure has been created, unable to represent life experience without distortion and compromise, but contemporaneously offering the only possible means of representation.

The tales, which are produced by the narrator's reading of the signs, appear as the re-elaborations of the great tales of the Western tradition. The fates of Orlando, Oedipus, Faust, Macbeth and Helen of Troy are interwoven, creating a landscape that is purely literary, with no historical referent other than the history of the text itself. These tales have become common property, and the story of the self is at once subsumed to the social context, which can only allow the production of a limited number of variants. While each tale may be unique in its

manifestations, inevitably, it tells the same story as every other tale.<sup>10</sup> The ludic nature of the combinatory narrative process is contained within the compact structure of Il castello, but in La taverna, both thematically and structurally, the tales take on a vertiginous dimension, in the spiralling vortex of literariness, as the reading becomes increasingly problematised. The relationship between the narrator and the tale enters into a phase of crisis as chronology becomes destabilised and the subject ever more irretrievable.<sup>11</sup>

The possibilities of meaning, which were indicated in Il castello, develop into contradictory messages which point the way to an impossibility of meaning, ending in the three tales of madness and the abandonment of the game. This final dissolution is already prefigured in the 'storia del regno dei vampiri', in itself the story of a transgressive and unacceptable transformation. The narrator contemplates the array of cards and writes:

Le stesse carte in questo racconto vengono lette a rilette con significati diversi; la mano del narratore oscilla convulsa e indica La Torre e l'Appeso come invitandoci a riconoscere nelle telefoto sfocate d'un giornale della sera le istantanee d'un atroce fatto di cronaca: una donna che precipita da vertiginosa altezza nel vuoto tra le facciate dei grattacieli. (87-88)

The plethora of possible readings, unleashed by the cards, flees the tremulous control of the narrator's intentions. The anachronistic images of death, in which the unknown woman

plummets into the void, parallel the heady transportation of the narrator whose meaning is lost in the graphics of narrative and its readings. The word-image transcends the barriers of time, creating a dechronologised atemporal existence. The game betrays the player.

Although each tale has a narrator, this role does not appear in the first person in the written text. However, it might be asserted that this role is figured in the graphic narrative of the cards. The first person 'authority' belongs to the reader of the stories, but into the complex narrative framework of Il castello and La taverna, this unnamed narrator/reader also attempts to insert his own narrative. In Il castello, the narrator tries to discern his own story amidst the arrangement of cards, but is unable to do so. He writes:

Certamente anche la mia storia è contenuta in questo intreccio di carte, passato presente futuro, ma io non so più distinguerla dalle altre. La foresta, il castello, i tarocchi m'hanno portato a questo traguardo: a perdere la mia storia, a confonderla nel pulviscolo delle storie, a liberarmene. Quello che rimane di me è solo l'ostinazione maniaca a completare, a chiudere, a far tornare i conti.  
(46)

The narrator has lost his story in the complexity of the narrative structure, suggesting also the unremarkable character of the story of the self, and the tenuous hold which the self might have on its own story. The loss of the self is, however, immediately figured as liberation, as the narrator makes no attempt at retrieval. Failure to possess the part, however, is

transformed into the desire to possess the whole, as the narrator goes on to complete the symmetry of all possible tales. The narrator does not possess the cards, and at the very moment of completion, as has already been noted, the cards are reshuffled, and the narrator's tale is lost forever.

In La taverna, greater space is devoted to the narrator's own destiny. In the chapter entitled 'Anch'io cerco di dire la mia', the narrator attempts to articulate his own past at greater length. Like each of the other narrators, he must choose a card with which to introduce himself. Initially, he identifies with the 'Re di Bastoni' who appears to be wielding a tool which might be identified as a pen. It is not enough for the narrator to select one mirror-image of himself, and he subsequently selects three other cards in which he imagines himself to be figured:- il Cavaliere di Spade, l'Eremita and Il Bagatto. Thus the writer identifies not with one imaginary double, but with four, suggesting a further fragmentation of the writing-I in its habitual confrontation with the other. The image of wholeness, which is suggested but belied by the adoption of an imaginary ego, is further undermined by the splitting involved in the adoption of further subject positions. The biography produced by this choice is instructive. The narrator writes:

Per sentieri d'inchiostro s'allontana al  
galoppo lo slancio guerriero della giovinezza,  
l'ansia esistenziale, l'energia dell'avventura  
spesi in una carneficina di cancellature e  
fogli appallottolati. E nella carta che segue  
mi ritrovo nei panni d'un vecchio monaco

segregato da anni nella sua cella, topo di biblioteca che perlustra a lume di lanterna una sapienza dimenticata tra le note a piè di pagina e i rimandi degli indici analitici. Forse è arrivato il momento d'ammettere che il tarocco numero uno è il solo che rappresenta onestamente quello che sono riuscito a essere, un giocoliere o illusionista che dispone sul suo banco da fiera un certo numero di figure e spostandole, connettendole e scambiandole ottiene un certo numero d'effetti. (104-105)

The first image presented is specifically associated with the figure of Stendhal, 'l'Egotista di Grenoble'. It is a heroic image, lived nevertheless vicariously through the written word, and indeed destroyed by it. The written word is seen to be the graveyard of desire. The second card offers the picture of the writer as scholar tapping the fonts of wisdom, but he is also figured as a solitary ascetic in a dimly-lit world of books, searching for the light of knowledge which should radiate from them. Finally, the narrator adopts 'Il Bagatto' as the ego which most fully represents him. The image of the conjurer, who by sleight of hand, is able to generate certain illusions but nothing which is real, re-introduces the notion of play into the text and the idea that literature is unable to fulfill any function beyond that of its own creation.<sup>12</sup>

Although the narrator creates a chronological effect by displaying the cards in a linear fashion, it is misleading to read the cards as signifying a temporal progression. The various mirrors which the narrator selects, co-exist to create a collage

effect rather than a pictorial narrative. Each image is partial, and its truth emerges from its very fragmentation. The wholeness of each image is modified by its relationship with the others, and if a composite image of the self is produced, the result is, as Marilyn Schneider points out, that neither the card nor the storyteller 'exceeds the ontological status of image'.

In his essay, 'I livelli della realtà in letteratura', Calvino argues that the only reality which the written word can create, is that of the 'parola scritta'.<sup>13</sup> He goes on:

la condizione preliminare di qualsiasi opera letteraria è questa; la persona che scrive deve inventare quel primo personaggio che è l'autore dell'opera. Che una persona si metta tutto se stesso nell'opera che scrive è una frase che si dice spesso ma che non corrisponde mai a verità. E sempre solo una proiezione di se stesso che l'autore mette in gioco nella scrittura, e può essere la proiezione d'una vera parte di se stesso come la proiezione d'un io fittizio, d'una maschera. (316/7)

Thus at most the self which does emerge from the text can only be a projection, an imaginary I which is not the 'real' I. The literariness of the self created by narrative is confirmed by the readings offered by the first person narrator. Each series of cards produces a reworking of a tale already told; thus the narrator can only read what has already been read. This is reminiscent of the principle feature of the folk-tale, noted by Calvino in his introduction to Fiabe italiane, when he writes of the most secret property of the folk-tale as being 'la sua infinita varietà ed infinita ripetizione'. While the folk-tales



may vary in detail, their central concerns remain irreducibly the same. Nevertheless, Calvino goes on to argue the central importance of the narrator to each tale and the uniqueness of each narration. It is through the narrator, he writes, 'che si mutua il sempre rinnovato legame della fiaba atemporale col mondo dei suoi ascoltatori, con la Storia' (XIX).

In Il castello and La taverna, this relationship between the narrator, his tale and history seems to have been lost to the atemporality of narrative, consequently, instigating a different relationship between the self as a historical construct with a real temporal existence and the self as a literary, discursive construct, whose time is that of the narrative and whose space is the printed page. This radical separation between the two spheres departs from the notion of history as discourse, through which we had argued that the self in the works of Pavese and Bassani was constructed. In Il castello and La taverna, there is no sense of history beyond that of the printed word. The idea of a historical subject disappears as the projected self is figured as purely a literary creation.

Having selected his ideal egos from the pack of tarot cards, the narrator imagines an analogous situation in an art gallery and attempts a narrative reconstruction of the sequence of paintings which might be hung there.<sup>14</sup> He alights on the figures of St George and St Jerome who figure large in Renaissance

iconography. The first is again the symbol of the heroic and active, but is considered to be purely a fictitious personage. St Jerome, however, is endowed with an historical existence and is the symbol of the contemplative writer. Traditionally, he is depicted in a natural setting and the narrator writes:

nel paesaggio gli oggetti del leggere e dello scrivere si posano tra le rocce le erbe le lucertole, diventano prodotti e strumenti della continuità minerale-vegetale-animale. Tra le suppellettili dell'eremita c'è anche un teschio: la parola scritta tiene sempre presente la cancellatura della persona che ha scritto o di quella che leggerà. La natura inarticolata ingloba nel suo discorso il discorso umano. (105-106)

Death is a common theme in the tales of Il castello and La taverna, and the skull in the paintings of St Jerome is a *momento mori*, not only of physical death, but of the death of the self in writing. The loss of the self is double-edged, however, for although death and silence may be the fate of the narrator they are also the salvation of the tale. Walter Benjamin writes: 'Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death'.<sup>15</sup> It is the finality of death which is authoritative, for it represents the final card in the sequence. Ultimately, however, writing is figured as loss of the self. The narrator concludes: 'il mestiere dello scrivere uniforma le vite individuali, un uomo allo scrittoio assomiglia a ogni altro uomo allo scrittoio' (106).

Whereas for St Jerome writing or creation signifies death,

for the fictitious St George, it is the source of life. The narrative, which erases its producer, engenders the vitality of that which is produced. The imaginary St George becomes a historical entity through the medium of his creation. The narrator writes that fiction engenders belief and that *'nel modo che hanno i pittori e gli scrittori di credere a una storia che è passata per tante forme, e per il fatto di dipingerla e ridipingerla, di scriverla e riscriverla, se non era vera lo diventa'* (108). Thus the creation takes on a dimension which is denied to the creator. Art bestows its own reality, but it is a reality which pertains solely to its own dimension. The degree of intertextuality, apparent throughout the tales, confirms this inability of the fictive creation ever to go beyond itself. Each discourse can only refer to other discourses, but its creative possibilities are a testament to the power of the signifying system itself which authenticates the narrative content by virtue of its structuring potential.

The narrator's own story is, of course, not made up only of *'carte-soggetti'*. These images are added to, and modified, by the sequence of *'carte-predicati'* which recount the path which the subject has followed. The first of these cards, selected by the narrator, is the Cinque di Bastoni. Now the narrator is also the reader of his own narrative, and the interpretation proffered by him is that the Bastoni might signify, either the first childish strokes of the pen of him who seeks to communicate by

means of signs, or the 'legni di pioppo da cui s'impasta la bianca cellulosa e se ne sfogliano risme di pagine pronte per essere (e ancora i significati s'incrociano) vergate' (99). The choice of the final adjective here is interesting with its dual connotations of 'lined' and 'beaten', the violence of the metaphor again evoking the murderous quality of the written word. This card is followed by the 'Due di Denari' which is interpreted as a 'segno di scambio' (100). The reference is to the 'value' of different types of writing and how writing itself can incorporate value by dint of its very presence. The narrator also dwells on the ornate graphics of the card and, in particular, the shape of the letter 'S' which can be discerned - 'la lettera Esse che serpeggia per significare che è lì pronta a significare significati, il segno significante che ha la Forma di un Esse perchè i suoi significati prendano forma di esse pure loro' (100). The materiality of the writing suggests the primacy of the signifier over the signified, and the ability of the signifier to order and control the signified on account of the material existence which it has. It in itself is a signifying medium.

The following two cards, the Sette di Coppe and Temperanza, symbolise the infernal or sublime inspiration which the writer awaits, but the Fante di Coppe indicates that the narrator's wait is in vain, for 'l'anima è un calamaio asciutto' (100). The next option is to make a pact with the devil in order to ensure the

success of the work, and it is with the diabolic image that the narrator most closely associates. Writing becomes the saying of the unsaid and the unsayable and the scene of confrontation with the other. Elsewhere Calvino has written 'è il richiamo di ciò che è fuori dal vocabolario che muove la letteratura', for writing is the writing of desire, the compensation of the lack.<sup>16</sup> It is thus appropriate that the model to which the narrator turns is the Marquis de Sade, 'che ha spinto la parola a esplorare i confini neri del pensabile' (101) and to his story of Justine. Here the text goes beyond simple narrative to become the narrative of the Other which speaks through the narration, bearing the liberating effect of the dream. The narrator continues 'Nella scrittura ciò che parla è il represso' (102) and inevitably at this stage evokes Freud and his reworking of the Oedipus myth. Both the stories of Justine and Oedipus are interwoven with the narrator's tale for they are his also. He concludes: 'di tutto questo la scrittura avverte come l'oracolo e purifica come la tragedia... La scrittura insomma ha un sottosuolo che appartiene alla specie, o almeno alla civiltà, o almeno a certe categorie di reddito' (103). That which writing makes possible is not the self, but the self as a culturally defined construct. If writing sanctifies the story of Oedipus, it is through its transformation into the primal story of us all.

Throughout Il castello and la taverna, the first person narrator exists on the margins of the discourse. The narrator

becomes a function as his role is in no way individualised beyond that of narrative voice. He thus parallels the situation of all narrators who, necessarily, inhabit the margins of their discourse, for their tale is sanctioned not by their own experience and entry into discourse, but by the context supplied by discourse. The image of the mirror or double, by means of which the subject enters discourse, gives an imaginary illusion of wholeness, but by its very nature the double or specular image is inevitably other in that it is not the subject. The subject in discourse is not the subject, but ultimately represents the only position open to the subject. The discursive subject is the only identity which is sanctioned.

The fragmentary and contradictory images which the narrator, who is every narrator, gives of himself are paralleled throughout the rest of the stories. The narrator's story is one of loss, and this loss is figured elsewhere in terms of madness, metamorphosis and of death. Perhaps the archetypal character in all of this is Faust, who spends his life attempting to alter the nature of things, and who finally loses himself in his pact with the devil. His quest is for mastery of the whole, but his conclusion belies the search: 'Il mondo non esiste...non c'è un tutto dato tutto in una volta; c'è un numero finito d'elementi le cui combinazioni si moltiplicano a miliardi di miliardi, e di queste solo poche trovano una forma e un senso e s'impongono in mezzo a un pulviscolo senza senso e senza forma; come le

settantotto carte del mazzo di tarocchi nei cui accostamenti appaiono sequenze di storie che subito si disfano' (97). The contrary conclusion is, temporarily at least, found by Parsifal whose story has been interwoven with that of Faust. He affirms the harmony of the empty space around which the world is constructed, but like everything else, the position is dependent upon the arbitrary shuffling of the cards.

That no-one holds the solution of the enigma is predicated in the story of Astolfo who has gone to the moon in search of Orlando's reason. Here he meets the poet whom he supposes to possess the secrets of the universe, but the poet's response is negative: 'la luna è un deserto...da questa sfera arida parte ogni discorso e ogni poema: e ogni viaggio attraverso foreste battaglie tesori banchetti alcove ci riporta qui, al centro d'un orizzonte vuoto' (39). This annihilatory image of the poetic function is compounded in the final chapter of La taverna which is introduced as the highest mode of expression to which the cards might rise. The tales of Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth intersect in a series of bloody murders, encounters of death and of madness. Macbeth has the final word as he says: 'Sono stanco che Il Sole resti in cielo, non vedo l'ora che si sfasci la sintassi del Mondo, che si mescolino le carte del gioco, i fogli dell'in-folio, i frantumi di specchio del disastro' (120).

Macbeth seems to announce his surrender to the realm of non-meaning, signalling also the demise of the signifying system



itself. The incompleteness of the self which was first figured by the mutilatory loss of speech at the opening of Il castello, finally, becomes total loss. Paradigmatic of this are perhaps the two cards in the first tarot pack, La Torre and Il Diavolo, whose image has been lost, but who still achieve signification in their absence. They become meaningful on account of the place which they occupy within the system of the tarot, but are entirely dependent on this discourse, for outside of it they do not exist. Deprived of a graphic existence, they rely solely on their position in the signifying chain, and are able to effect modifications in the meanings of the cards in their sequence. Like the I, they cannot signify outside of this discourse, for they have no intrinsic meaning; therefore their part in discourse is to remain on the margins. They signify in the shadow of an absence.

The relationship posited between the narrator of the texts and the texts themselves is indeed complex. Here there is no question of what Romberg would call 'role narrative', for the narrator has no 'personality', no name, no place in history. What remains, is the narrator figured as narrative function, or as a rhetorical strategy. He (sic) has no existence outside that of the written word, and his text refers not to a pre-existing historical reality, but to a pre-existing textual reality. Both reader and narrator, he is a producer of discourse, but nevertheless, the discourse does not originate in him. If there

is a transcendent term here, it is not the I, but the system of signs which precedes the I. Significantly, however, it should be noted that although the I does not create the signifiers which generate the signifieds, it is instrumental in producing a specific discourse from the miasma of all possible discourses.<sup>17</sup> This is not to argue that the discourse produced by the I deserves to be viewed as having a primal position in the determination of meaning, for the chance aspect of the 'affiancamenti casuali' of the cards can only undermine this notion. However, each narrative does have meaning, and this meaning emerges from the dialectical process which is constructed between the self and discourse.

The effacement of the I, as an individualised historical self, is itself pregnant with significance, for it betrays a particular conception of the self and its relation to history. The ambiguity of this position is inscribed in the dual role of the narrator/reader. This is not a role which can be separated, for the reading function of the narrator is simultaneously a narrating one. Each reading constructs its own narrative and, as the graphic positioning of the cards suggest, the original text remains in the margins.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, each narrative is essentially a re-elaboration or a reading of another text. It is thus impossible to maintain the hierarchy whereby narration is seen to precede the reading experience. The production of discourse is necessarily the narrativisation of the already read.

This lack of originality in writing precipitates a crisis in which the self no longer attempts to construct an autobiographical text in its own image, but allows itself to be dispersed and distorted through a veritable hall of mirrors. The mirror image is no longer one of wholeness, but of continual refraction, of perceived otherness. The result is that the self no longer portrays itself through one ideal image, but is seen to be constructed through an array of partial images which fail to reveal a composite whole. The final consequence of this is that the fragmented self which is revealed by the text becomes a product of the process of secondary reading undertaken by the other.

While the instability of the narrating I was apparent in the texts of Pavese and of Bassani, it is the acuteness of this perception in the work of Calvino which radically alters the status of the I at the level of the text. Effacement and loss are saliently inscribed in the disembodied I's flight from narrating persona to narrative function. Unable to generate original meaning, the self in crisis adopts a posture which consciously conceals its intent. The ludic structure of Il castello and La taverna both parallels this deceit and indicates that no other strategy is possible, in the context of the terrible shuffling of the cards. The dilemma of the self is therefore partially resolved in the shift from narrating/writing to reading. Authority is transmitted from the I to the You which

becomes responsible for the story. The You assumes the role of the originator of the text, as the I renounces its role as the generator of meaning and particularly of self meaning.

In Il castello and La taverna, the narrating I retains this dual function. However, if we turn our attention to Calvino's later novel, Se una notte d'inverno, un viaggiatore, it becomes evident that a further significant shift has taken place. Here the activity of the Reader is foregrounded while the narrating I formally renounces its place of prominence, by refusing to inscribe at all its presence as text.

The novel begins: 'Stai per cominciare a leggere il nuovo romanzo "Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore" di Italo Calvino' (3). The direct address to the reader and the overtly self-referential allusion to the novel itself are the first of the many vertiginous effects which we encounter in reading the novel. The main protagonist of the novel is the 'Tu, Lettore' who is consistently addressed and whose story occupies the greater part of the novel. It is a story about reading and the quest for the Book, a quest which involves many adventures and which is essentially a quest for possession, a struggle for mastery. Written in the second person, it is obviously questionable if this can be described as a first person narrative at all and to a discussion of this point we shall shortly return. As Richard Andrews has said, however, it is 'a book about books' and, as

such, is instructive in dealing with the issues which we have already raised.<sup>19</sup>

Briefly, the plot of the novel can be summarised as follows: the hero, il Lettore, has purchased Calvino's latest novel Se una notte... and, having settled down to read the first chapter, discovers that the book has been incorrectly bound and that he does not possess a complete volume. Furious, he returns to the bookshop where a second surprise awaits him. Due to a further publishing error, the book he had purchased is not Calvino's novel, but the work of a Polish author. Anxious to continue his reading, he decides to take a copy of the Polish work, only to discover that this is an entirely different novel, but, gripped by the tale, reads on. Now he is accompanied in his reading by Ludmilla, la Lettrice, and together they join forces in the search for the completed book. The novel which we read is the story of their unending search, their subsequent romance and in addition, the chapters of the numerous books which they read. Their desire becomes ours, as we become doubly engrossed in each of the incomplete novels and in the narrative of their own desire for love and the completed work. They never find the definitive novel, but, at the end of the novel, they do find each other, and we are left on the happy-ever-after note of wedded bliss. Se una notte is a novel about desire, and the link between sexual desire and desire in narrative is pursued and maintained throughout. Our interest, however, lies with the more prosaic topic of

narrative technique, and in this domain the novel is interesting both on account of the fact that each of the fragments of novels which the Lettore comes across is written in the first person, and for the way in which the Tu, Lettore is consistently addressed directly through the novel.<sup>20</sup>

To return to the question of whether or not the novel may be regarded as a first person narrative, it is valuable to return to the work of Genette and of Benveniste for an elucidation of this point. In Nouveau discours du récit where Genette expands on some of the issues raised by his previous work 'Discours du récit', he firmly concludes that a text written in the second person must be classed as 'hétérodiégétique'. His definition appears somewhat arbitrary, for it rests on the contention that 'est hétérodiégétique toute narration qui n'est pas...à la première personne' and he might easily have asserted the contrary to be true i.e. that any narrative not in the third person is 'homodiégétique'.<sup>21</sup> It might be argued, however, that his designation is correct, for the 'Tu' of Se una notte... can be differentiated from the 'tu' of novels such as Fallaci's Lettera ad un bambino mai nato or Tomizza's L'amicizia.<sup>22</sup> In the latter cases, the presence of the 'tu' is constantly evoked, but this is done by an identifiable first person narrator who occupies a primary position. Conversely, in Calvino's work the narrating I is never present as such, i.e. the narrator never says "I", hence we appear to have an instance of a genuine second person novel,

albeit something of a 'cas limite'. The difficulty can perhaps be resolved if we return to the work of Benveniste.<sup>23</sup>

In his discussion of 'histoire' and 'discours', Benveniste drew attention to two essentially different types of language. The first, 'histoire', would seem apparently speakerless in that its meaning is not derived from the time of utterance itself, whereas the second, 'discours', is dependent on the moment of its utterance for the construction of its meaning, and we have seen that each type of language has specific temporal, spatial and pronomial constructions which allow us to differentiate between the types.<sup>24</sup> An essential feature of 'discours' is shifters, locutions which rely on the moment of utterance for their signification, and primary amongst these is the I-you matrix upon which 'discours' is based. If, as Benveniste argues, every I presupposes a you, i.e. a listener or recipient of the message, it perhaps follows therefore that every you must have an I. Just as the you is not necessarily overtly activated by the I, it can be assumed that although 'you' may appear without an 'I' overtly marked, it is nevertheless dependent on the I-you system of communication for its evocation. This being the case, the 'Tu, Lettore' of Se una notte is being addressed by a first person who, in fact, commands the discourse.

The direct address to the Lettore is also characterised by other shifters, e.g. the use of present and perfect tenses,



temporal locutions such as "yesterday" and "today", spatial locutions such as "here" and "there", which all indicate that we are reading a first person text. The only difference between this and other first person texts is that the narrator does not specifically refer to himself, but remains in the most marginal of positions in relation to his discourse, leaving only the trace of his I as a reminder of the site of the text's production. We have obviously come a long way from the definition of first person narrative given by Romberg, but the absent presence of the first person narrator of Se una notte... seems the inevitable extension of the impossibility of writing the self. The desire for mastery claimed by the narrator of the classic first person text, whereby the self was its own authentication, but which was seen as problematic in the works of Pavese, Bassani and in the earlier Calvino, is now renounced completely in this discourse. Handing the text over to the reader and telling his story is the final abandonment of the fiction of the self as master.

A further point emerges from an examination of Benveniste's work and the question of the you in discourse. Just as the I-subject is split between the I of the 'énonciation' and the I of the 'énoncé', and is thus made irrevocably other by language, so also is the you-subject divided. In the same way that the I of the first person text becomes a kind of third person, so too does the you. The you is figured both as the receiver of the

énonciation but here is also the subject of the énoncé, and is thus captured by language. It is therefore appropriate that the story of the Tu, Lettore is one of desire and the search to complement his lack. He too has entered language and indeed, even more than the I, must be subject to it.

Jonathan Culler, in The Pursuit of Signs, dedicates one chapter to the discussion of apostrophe in narrative and in the lyric.<sup>25</sup> He writes that apostrophe 'makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself'. (135) Thus apostrophe constructs its own sense of temporality which is that of discourse. It is completely self-referential. This in itself problematises the use of apostrophe as an extended metaphor, as is the case in Se una notte, for as Culler goes on: 'apostrophe resists narrative because its now is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a now of discourse, of writing...a fictional time in which nothing happens but which is the essence of happening' (152).<sup>26</sup> The narrative of Se una notte therefore occupies an apparently anomalous position, for it short-circuits the communicative strategy of the narrator. Narrative occurs in spite of the narration. However, as has already been noted, every narrative inhabits two distinct time zones i.e. it obeys its internal chronology, but also takes place in time. The narrative act is durative, although this aspect is often eschewed by the fiction. To trope continually on the communicative situation, is to

emphasise primarily this second temporal aspect as a constant reminder of the fiction-making process. To evoke consistently the you, consistently draws attention to the source of the discourse, and as Culler concludes, 'this figure [apostrophe] which seems to establish relations between the self and the other can in fact be read as an act of radical interiorisation and solipsism' (146).

To address the other is to recall the self for, as has been argued, the self is constructed only through language and cannot escape it. The strategy adopted by the narrator of Se una notte is curiously narcissistic, for it involves a pretence of absence which persistently attempts to deny this absence through its very structure. It is, nevertheless, somewhat misleading to construe Calvino's novel as one extended apostrophe and indeed, it is possibly less so than the two novels previously mentioned, in which the you plays a significant role. While the Tu, Lettore is often addressed as such, and the main tense of the novel is the present, the greater part of the novel is narrative.<sup>27</sup> The you of the 'énonciation' becomes subordinate to the you of the 'énoncé' as the story of the Lettore unfolds, and is only reactivated when the narrator adopts the more explicit formula of Tu, Lettore, which ruptures the effect of the historic present of storytelling by introducing the 'real' present of discourse. The retention of the present tense throughout blurs the distinction between 'histoire' and 'discours' which was noted in our

examination of Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini. It is significant also for the rejection of the verb forms of 'histoire' and particularly, of the past historic which, as we have seen, functions as an indication of the mastery of the past through discourse. The present tense here operates in a fashion similar to the predictive manner of 'i tarocchi', for it posits a narrative of uncertainty, of unfulfilled desire. It appears, therefore, as another indication of the loss experienced by the narrating subject who chooses not only to conceal himself in the text, but who also refuses to claim mastery over the text by adopting the closed tense system of the 'histoire' mode. Thus the narrator's address to the Lettore, and his narrative of the Lettore, seem to fuse on a temporal level at least, but they do remain distinct, and the following passage may serve as a useful indication of this.

Midway through the novel, the Lettore enters the apartment of Ludmilla for the first time. She is not at home, so the Lettore has the chance of 'reading' the text constructed by Ludmilla's apartment in order to obtain clues about her life, and an insight into her personality. Suddenly, an abrupt change takes place:

Come sei, Lettrice? E tempo che questo libro in seconda persona si rivolga non più soltanto a un generico tu maschile, forse fratello o sosia d'un io ipocrita, ma direttamente a te che sei entrata fin dal Secondo Capitolo come Terza Persona necessaria perché il romanzo sia un romanzo, perché tra quella Seconda Persona maschile e la Terza femminile qualcosa avvenga,

prenda forma, s'affermi o si guasti, secondo le fasi delle vicende umane (142).

Several points emerge from this. Firstly, the narrator interrupts his 'dialogue' with the Lettore to evoke for the first time the Lettrice. The rejection of the Lettore betrays the narrator's wish to control the narrative and draws attention to the narrator as source, relegating the Lettore to the position of object. The you of the Lettore is thereby cancelled from the text and his dependence on it is highlighted. Secondly, the written quality of the discourse is underlined in the reference to the book. The searchers for the Book are overtly inscribed as text themselves. Thirdly, the narrator alludes to the demands of the plot to which the novel owes its existence and from which, springs narrative desire. The most revealing feature is, however, to be found in the phrase referring to the male you, 'forse fratello o sosia d'un io ipocrita'. This is suggestive of the narcissistic element of apostrophe noted by Culler, for the image of the you, as the I's double, reveals not only the rhetorical strategy of the narrator, but also the alienation experienced by the narrator in the conscious representation of the self as other. It is the final recognition of the failure of the I to represent itself in discourse.

The narrator continues his address to the Lettrice, and now the Lettore is figured in the third person: 'questo libro è stato attento finora a lasciare aperta al Lettore che legge, la possibilità d'identificarsi col Lettore che è letto' (142).

Before going on to discuss the text in greater detail and the status of the you, it must be noted that just as the I of first person narrative cannot be confused with the I of the author even though it might function in a homologous manner, so too must we distinguish between the Tu, Lettore and the real reader. The Tu, Lettore is at most a projection of the real reader and of the activity of reading, but it cannot be argued that the real reader is addressed more directly by this text than by any other (although we may indeed be disconcerted by this strategy). Nor too can the Tu, Lettore be equated with concepts such as Iser's 'Implied Reader' nor Eco's 'Lettore Modello'.<sup>28</sup> These notions refer to the quality of reader competence which any text demands, and the subject positions offered to the reader by any text. The Tu, Lettore is a textual object and as such partakes of the text's proliferation of meaning, but does not take part in it. He is not us, for he too is read as text.

The narrator continues: 'Sta continuando la sua ricognizione della casa di cui gli hai dato le chiavi, il Lettore' (144). The Lettore has now been excluded from the circuit of communication and has been reduced to the level of Benveniste's 'non-personne'. This ludic juggling of language echoes the strategy of Il castello, demonstrating the power of language over the subject and the loss of the subject in language. Some pages later, the Lettore is again conjured up - 'Lettore drizza l'orecchio' (147) - and now it is the Lettrice

who is lost to the text, only to reappear a little later, before becoming fused with the Lettore's 'tu' to become a 'voi': 'Siete a letto insieme, Lettore e Lettrice. Dunque è venuto il momento di chiamarvi con la seconda persona plurale, operazione molto impegnativa, perché equivale a considerarvi un unico soggetto' (154).

Interspersed with these passages addressing alternatively the Lettore and the Lettrice are sections which recount their actions, albeit in the second person. It is in those sections that the you is no longer figured as the receiver of the utterance, but is constructed in it and by it. The passivity of the recipient of the address in the shifting strategies of the narrator serves to support the quest for mastery of the latter. Just as the I of the texts we have examined constantly disappears within the text so too does the you-subject figured here. Hence there is something ironic in the narrator's address to the Lettore as he re-evokes his presence: 'Il tu che era passato alla Lettrice può da una frase all'altra tornare a puntarsi su di te. Sei sempre uno dei tu possibili. Chi oserebbe condannarti alla perdita del tu, catastrofe non meno terribile della perdita dell'io?' (147-148). Again this appears to be an attempt by the narrator to wield his power over the Lettore, by threatening to eradicate him from discourse, and drawing attention to his precarious status as a signifying entity. The 'tu' inhabits the dangerous territory of the textual margin.



In their search for the Book, the Lettore and the Lettrice encounter a number of other characters who are involved in the sphere of literature either as consumers or producers of texts. The Lettore himself is presented as someone who 'per principio non s'aspetta più niente da niente' (4) and whose sole escape, from his general feeling of cynicism or disillusionment, is in 'questo piacere giovanile dell'aspettativa' which he finds in the world of books. Literature is a safe activity, for it seems to harness and tame the unruly circuit of desire of the extra-literary text, although the two are indeed paralleled. Ludmilla, the Lettrice, is presented as an even more rapacious reader and devourer of novels. Her literary preferences are quite distinct. She states: 'preferisco i romanzi...che mi fanno entrare subito in un mondo dove ogni cosa è precisa, concreta, ben specificata. Mi dà una soddisfazione speciale sapere che le cose sono fatte in quel determinato modo e non altrimenti, anche le cose qualsiasi che nella vita mi sembrano indifferenti' (29-30). Ludmilla is a reader who seeks closure and an order which would compensate for the lack experienced outside reading. Akin to this is her retention of detail from the books which she has read, a facet which suggests again a desire for control in the appropriation of another's text. Her desire is also the desire for the other. She remarks: 'leggere è andare incontro a qualcosa che sta per essere e ancora nessuno sa cosa sarà' (71). Her image of literary production is an organic one as later she admits: 'il

romanzo che più vorrei leggere in questo momento...dovrebbe avere come forza motrice solo la voglia di raccontare, d'accumulare storie su storie, senza pretendere d'imporrti una visione del mondo, ma solo di farti assistere alla propria crescita, come una pianta, un aggrovigliarsi come di rami e di foglie' (92). In her view, the book is the transcendent term in the field of literature, endowed with an existence independent of its author. Its origins are in itself and it is the very image of the self-begetting novel.

It is this notion which explains her reluctance to cross over to the 'altra parte', which is the world of the writer, by accompanying the Lettore to the publishing house. Were she to have done so she would have met Cavedagna, the publisher disillusioned with the world of writing on account of the daily contact which he makes with real authors. He has a nostalgic vision of 'gli autori veri' (10) who only existed as names on the cover of their books, and who were endowed with the same reality as that of their characters. The voice of the author was the voice of the Other, 'un vuoto percorso da fantasmi' (102), and this ideal could only be marred by the contingency of the everyday.

In contrast to Ludmilla and her complete absorption in the text, Lotaria, her sister, is presented as a voracious violator of the text. She is oblivious to the eroticised relationship

between the reader and the text, and subjects it to a series of dismembering procedures in the aim of obtaining all meaning. Perhaps the most brutal of these is the computer analysis which calculates the number of times that each word appears in the text, thus supposedly enabling the reader to 'read' the text without wasting time on the actual reading. Like Ludmilla, Lotaria betrays a desire for appropriation, although her desire is not to be fulfilled through narrative itself, but through the possession of all possible meanings which the text might disseminate. This need for appropriation is paralleled by the struggle of the two university professors who both claim proprietorial rights over the same text. It is a fight for possession between readers and it is they who will decide the fate of the text. The lost author of the text has been cancelled out of the signifying process as possession of his text is contested by the reader.

Another figure presented as a textual butcher is Arkadian Porphyritch who ruthlessly censors and destroys texts by day but who is an avid reader of these same texts by night. While this indicates both the power of narrative as a subversive medium and its power too to hold the reader in thrall, it nevertheless posits the reader as the final and most powerful partner in the literary chain. Once the text has been published, it is the reader who ultimately controls its destiny and who makes of the text what he will. The insignificance of the author is

highlighted in two final images of consumers of books. Firstly, there is the Sultana, a latterday Scheherezade, whose desire for literature is fed by computer produced books, so that the activity of reading may absorb her desire for revolution. Unlike Scheherezade, she is told tales in order to assuage her desire for death and destruction. In this instance, the author has no place at all. Even more significant, however, is the non-reader, Innerio, who uses books with which to sculpt. He exploits the material existence of the book while ignoring its quality as text. Surely the author did not intend this!

In the second chapter of the novel the narrator remarks to the Lettore: 'Chi tu sia, Lettore, quale sia la tua età, lo stato civile, la professione, il reddito, sarebbe indiscreto chiederti'. This obfuscation of the possible identity of the reader highlights the role of the reader as reading function, but this refusal to name, to attribute other meaning to the reader, is a strategy which serves to mirror the situation of the narrator. The novel offers us not only images of readers, but also several authorial/narratorial images which function as a further series of doubles of the 'io-ipocrita' of the narrator. In many ways the prime mover of the narrative is Ermes Marana, the translator and forger of texts, whose machinations are responsible for the tortuous path which the Lettore must follow in his quest.<sup>29</sup> The eroticised relationship which, as we have briefly noted, is fundamental to the relationship between reader

and text, lies at the heart of Marana's urge to destroy and to disseminate. An ex-lover of Ludmilla, he was inspired by jealousy for the 'rivale invisibile' (159), the author whose presence constantly came between him and Ludmilla. His dilemma therefore became: 'Come fare a sconfiggere non gli autori ma la funzione dell'autore, l'idea che dietro ogni libro ci sia qualcuno che garantisce una verità a quel mondo di fantasmi e d'invenzioni per il solo fatto d'avervi investito la propria verità, d'aver identificato se stesso con quella costruzione di parole?' (159). His aim, therefore, is to destroy the myth of the author as the site of textual authority and to undermine the mysterious link between the author and 'his' text. He therefore dreams of 'una letteratura tutta d'apocrifi, di false attribuzioni, d'imitazioni e contraffazioni e pastiches' (159), in order to alter radically the relationship between the reader and the text and instigate a mistrust of the authorial voice as origin.

What Marana seeks is to appropriate the authorial mystique for himself, thereby positing himself as origin, albeit the origin of a complex web of deceit. In this, he is not unlike the figure of Il Bagatto in La taverna, who symbolises the writer as a verbal illusionist, and indeed it is on account of his narrative trickery that the Lettore is propelled halfway across the world in his search. Like the 'genuine' author, Marana is driven on by his anxiety or desire for completion even though his

task consists of causing the proliferation of incomplete novels, false attributions and fake translations. He is the diabolic image of the writer (which was also evoked in La taverna), as he unleashes the demons of the word which is no longer the Word.<sup>30</sup>

In opposition to Marana, who seeks to dissolve the very notion of the text, stands the 'Padre dei racconti', the 'veggente indio che racconta tutti i romanzi del mondo' (125). In his own way, however, the Padre dei racconti equally undermines the task of the author for he provides tangible evidence of the idea that all texts are already written, and thus disposes of the notion of the originality of the writer.<sup>31</sup> The access which he has to the universal store of texts prefigures the end of the novel where, the Lettore visits a library in a final attempt to obtain the books which he has been searching for, only to be thwarted once more. He falls into conversation with a group of other readers who discuss their experiences of reading. One of these readers mistakenly reads the titles which the Lettore is searching for as a single sentence, the opening paragraph of a single novel. He is not mistaken, however, for all books insistently recall other books which in the end are all one.

The anxieties created in the author due to this seemingly universal desire for appropriation of the text are expressed in the diary of Silas Flannery. Firstly, he writes of his readers

who 'sono i miei vampiri' (170) and expresses the wish to disappear from the scene of writing so that this parasitical appropriation would not be of him. He then speculates on two contradictory possibilities in the writing function:

Alle volte penso alla materia del libro da scrivere come qualcosa che già c'è pensieri già pensati, dialoghi già pronunciati, storie già accadute, luoghi e ambienti visti, il libro non dovrebbe essere altro che l'equivalente del mondo non scritto tradotto in scrittura. Altre volte invece mi pare di comprendere che tra il libro da scrivere e le cose che già esistono ci può essere solo una specie di complementarità: il libro dovrebbe essere al controparte scritta del mondo non scritto; la sua materia dovrebbe essere ciò che non c'è né potrà esserci se non quando sarà scritto, ma di cui ciò che c'è sente oscuramente il vuoto nella propria incompletezza. (171-172)

The conflict here is between the notion of writing not only as representational, but also as the already read, and the idea that writing may function as a kind of oracle, producing a breach in the texture of the non-written by virtue of some unique, inherent property. Both, however, induce a feeling of stasis in the writer, in his oscillation between the two poles of writing. He develops the idea that the written word somehow transcends the individual writer, and, as such, necessitates the use of an impersonal construction of the verb 'scrivere'. However, the oracular function of the written word can only be activated by an individualised reader, whose act of reading validates and sanctifies that which is written.

The association between the written word and the sacred is



confirmed in Flannery's anecdote concerning Mohammed and his scribe. The prophet is dictating to his scribe, but, at one point, fails to complete his sentence. Instinctively the scribe does so for him, but is horrified when Mohammed elects to leave this sentence as it stands, accepting the scribe's word as the Word of Allah. As a result, the scribe loses his faith and deserts the prophet. Flannery's conclusion is that the scribe was wrong to do so, for power is invested in the word and not in the man. In Flannery's rewriting of the tale he proposes:

è sulla pagina, non prima, che la parola, anche quella del raptus profetico, diventa definitiva, cioè scrittura. E solo attraverso la limitatezza del nostro atto dello scrivere che l'immensità del non-scritto diventa leggibile, cioè attraverso le incertezze dell'ortografia, le sviste, i lapsus, gli sbalzi incontrollati della parola e della penna. Altrimenti ciò che è fuori di noi non pretenda di comunicare con la parola, parlata o scritta: mandi per altre vie i suoi messaggi. (182-183)

Writing bears its own authority which is not inherent in the prophet but in itself. In the light of this, it is appropriate that the author disappears from the text, although he is contemporaneously saved by the sanctity of his vocation. Nevertheless, it is in the image of the scrivener that the tensions between reading and writing are apparently reconciled: 'Il copista viveva contemporaneamente in due dimensioni temporali, quella della lettura e quella della scrittura, poteva scrivere senza l'angoscia del vuoto che s'apre davanti alla penna; leggere senza l'angoscia che il proprio atto non si

concentri in alcun oggetto materiale' (178). The scrivener, however, is a figure of the past and his role is no longer conceivable in the modern world, hence it is inevitable that Flannery follow the way offered to him by Marana.

Marana has approached Flannery in the belief not only that his work is eminently falsifiable, but also that he, Flannery, is particularly suited to the work of forger, and, as such, represents Marana's ideal author. Marana's aim is to proliferate and disperse the homogeneous image of the author whereas Flannery claims 'il mio scopo è di catturare nel libro il mondo illeggibile, senza centro, senza io' (180). He seeks not to write that which is writable, but to reveal the impossible, the Other itself through writing. Two alternative paths appear open to him; either to write a single book which would contain everything, or to write every book and exhaust the potential of literature in this manner. The idea of the single book brings us back to the idea of the sacred text which would exclude everything not written in it, so he must adopt the second alternative. Both projects are, however, designed to secure mastery for the author and to restore the author to the primal position of signification. He receives a salutary warning from Ludmilla, who, on hearing of the plot to falsify Flannery's manuscripts which Flannery believes to be masterminded by Marana, counsels sagaciously that 'le congiure sfuggono sempre dalle mani dei loro capi' (193). Mastery is an impossible achievement, for

it is inevitably betrayed by those whom it seeks to master. The only strategy left open to Flannery is to become the writer of apocryphal texts in order that this act of concealment might reveal its truth through the veil drawn over it.

He decides on this vocation 'perché scrivere è sempre nascondere qualcosa in modo che venga poi scoperto; perché la verità che può uscire dalla mia penna è come una scheggia saltata via da un grande macigno per un urto violento e proiettata lontano; perché non c'è certezza fuori dalla falsificazione.'

(193) Flannery's dilemma knows no solution, but perhaps he has arrived at the only compromise possible. To recognise that the self inevitably disappears in writing is to accept the rules of the game and to postpone the crisis by means of participation. Nevertheless, by hoping to reveal the self through the conscious strategy of denying the self in writing, the writer betrays again his desire to gain possession of the text.

Interspersed between these authorial images are the ten titled chapters of the novel which are the ten first chapters of the novels which the Lettore encounters in his search. Each of these chapters is written in the first person and each displays a degree of self-reflexiveness which mirrors the anxiety displayed by the author characters.<sup>32</sup> None of these novels exceeds the confines of the first chapter, so all contain the limitless potential of the unfinished novel.<sup>33</sup> In the first of these

chapters, entitled 'Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore', the nameless first person narrator refers to his status as first person character. He points out to the reader that the only thing which the reader as yet knows about him, is that he is called I, but that this, in itself, is enough for the reader to begin to identify with him. He continues:

così come l'autore pur non avendo nessuna intenzione di parlare di se stesso, ed avendo deciso di chiamare "io" il personaggio quasi per sottrarlo alla vista, per non doverlo nominare o descrivere, perché qualsiasi altra denominazione o attributo l'avrebbe definito di più che questo spoglio pronome, pure per il solo fatto di scrivere "io" egli si sente spinto a mettere in questo "io" un po' di se stesso, di quel che lui sente o immagina di sentire. (15-16)

This identification is precarious, for the I's story is as yet ill-defined. The I is indeed a strange signifier, for although it seems to welcome some form of reader identification as the primary source of meaning, this 'spoglio pronome' is, in fact, devoid of meaning until it is constructed through the discourse. The reader therefore identifies initially with the subject position taken up by the I as the producer of discourse, yet subsequent identification requires the reader to abandon the difference which exists between the self and the other, but such is the desire of the reader to identify that he is willing to undergo any transformation in order to fulfil his desire. It is this desire which is constantly thwarted at the end of each chapter, when the reader is unable to discover what happened

next. The reader's identification with the I must therefore be figured as loss.

None of the various Is of the titled chapters recur throughout these sections of the novel. Each time the I of the narrative appears, its proliferation prevents any single identification. We have already seen how the I of writing is inevitably split and distorted by discourse, and the multiplication of the I seems to vindicate this argument.<sup>34</sup> The narrator of the chapter, 'In una rete di linee che s'intersecano', offers a different interpretation. He writes of the countless images produced by the kaleidoscope and suggests a parallel role for the self in narrative: 'E la mia immagine che voglio moltiplicare, ma non per narcisismo o megalomania come si potrebbe troppo facilmente credere: al contrario, per nascondere, in mezzo a tanti fantasmi illusori, di me stesso, il vero io che li fa muovere' (162). Again we have returned to the I who is conscious of the disappearance of the self in language, but who tries to minimise and recoup this loss through the adoption of a particular narrative strategy. Here the narrator deliberately seeks to conceal rather than reveal the self in narrative and by doing so aims to preserve the notion of a unified self who has authority for the text he writes.

This is a development of a remark made by the narrator of 'Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa' who dismisses any interest in

the search for the perfect form, 'la natura vera delle cose rivelandosi solo nello sfacelo' (56). This idea of fragmentation is fundamental to the whole of Se una notte, for Calvino's work, on the one hand, seems to attest to the impossibility of literature signifying beyond itself, and also develops the insight of Il castello, whereby the reader is seen to be the primary producer of the text. As JoAnn Cannon notes: 'the void created by the authorless text frees the reader from the constraint of a subservient 'faithfulness' to the author as origin of literature's truth and forces him to play an active role in filling out, completing the text. It is not the voice of the author that guarantees literature's truth but rather the activity of reading' (104). She concludes, however, that Calvino's strategy is in itself deceitful, and she sees this as being exemplified by the neat arbitrary closure effected by the author at the end of the novel, when the Lettore and Lettrice marry at the point when the Lettore happens to finish reading Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore. She writes:

This final, true conclusion belies Calvino's desire to incorporate the fragment into a meaningful whole, to become the source which would give closure and meaning to the text. The conclusion in fact reflects Calvino's strategy throughout the novel. The author's attempt to inscribe the activity of reading into his text ultimately reveals his desire to domesticate the dialogue between text and reader which is beyond the writer's control. But this strategy is unsuccessful: rather than bringing the text back within the author's sphere, it merely underlines the degree to which the text cannot be controlled or closed by the author. (108-109)

We have witnessed the many strategies adopted by Calvino and his author figures to bring the text back into their domaine by seemingly accepting its dissemination but, at the same time, claiming authority on account of their awareness of this dissemination. Cannon is right to argue that this ploy ultimately fails. At best, the conciliatory ending can be viewed as yet another ludic strategy which is undermined by the text itself, but the final reference to Calvino's book seeks to confirm supremacy over the text. The careful concealment of the narrating I does not prevent the I becoming a feature of discourse, but rather underlines this. The I has no existence outside discourse and, as the titled fragments demonstrate, each is defined by its part in a discourse.<sup>35</sup> Each of these I-narrators appears in a consciously worked genre pastiche. The ambiguity here stems from the insight offered by Il castello that narratives inevitably refer to other narratives, and that the I of narrative is endowed with an existence dependent on the possibilities of the already written text. To write a pastiche, is to claim that one is aware of this, but, in itself, this does not extricate the I from its peril.

The strategy employed in Se una notte is a final desperate attempt to assert the authority of the self over discourse. In the works which we have dealt with here, the I foregoes all efforts to portray an embodied self endowed with an historical



identity. This desire to conceal the self, denotes the wish to create a source which cannot be discredited and which is identified with the vatic power of all writing. The aim is, however, undermined by the text itself, for its fragmentation and persistent refusal to shed one unitary meaning, demonstrates the power of discourse to disperse the I, because the literary system itself establishes the transcendent term. In this context, the fate of the Cimmerian author and his texts come to symbolise the fate of all writers and their texts. The professor states:

'i libri sono i gradini della soglia... Tutti gli autori cimмери l'hanno passata... Poi comincia la lingua senza parole dei morti che dice le cose che solo la lingua dei morti può dire. Il cimmerico è l'ultima lingua dei vivi...è la lingua della soglia' (70). He goes on: 'i libri cimмери sono tutti incompiuti...perché è di là che continuano...nell'altra lingua, nella lingua silenziosa a cui rimandano tutte le parole dei libri che crediamo di leggere'.

All books are incomplete for they engage in a dialogue with the Other which knows no completion. Thus the self inhabits the threshold of the realm of non-being and is indexed by the text, not as source or authority, but as being at the command of discourse. The mastery which is sought is an attempt to ward off death. This is the story of all narrative for as one of the readers whom the Lettore meets in the library remarks: 'Il senso ultimo a cui rimandano tutti i racconti ha due facce: la continuità della vita, l'inevitabilità della morte' (261). Life is to be found in the text itself and with the reader, while death figures the silence of the author less text. First person

narrative is no longer conceived of as a retrospective evocation of a past ordered in language, but as the adventures and vicissitudes experienced by the I in language. The retention throughout the novel of the present tense of discourse indicates the priority of the fiction-making experience over the fiction produced. The cynicism of the I with regard to its own ontological status, which is manifest in the various strategies of textual concealment, does not rescue the I from the margins of the text, but rather, mirrors the impossibility of its being constructed as source.

Notes to Chapter Six

- 1 Barthes notes, "'ce qui se passe" dans le récit n'est, du point de vue référentiel (réel), à la lettre: rien; "ce qui arrive", c'est le langage tout seul, l'aventure du langage, dont la venue ne cesse jamais d'être fêtée'. In 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits', p.33.
- 2 See Maria Corti, 'Il gioco dei tarocchi come creazione di intrecci' in Viaggio Testuale, (Turin, 1978) pp.169-184, (p.171).
- 3 Marilyn Schneider, in 'Calvino at a Crossroads: Il castello dei destini incrociati', PMLA, (1980), 73-91 (p.75) notes that each face card serves as a 'title' for each narrator's autobiography, confirming the relationship traditionally perceived between the identity of the speaker and the existential dimension of the tale.
- 4 Cannon remarks in reference to Il castello: 'On both the thematic and structural levels, Calvino's text exposes the conventional nature of narrative fiction, its dependence on a finite number of forms governed by internal laws. This perception of the text as a mere combination of pre-established elements might seem to deny the richness of the literary text. But Il castello dei destini incrociati, at the same time that it unmasks the priority of the literary system over individual expression, upholds the tremendous potential of the literary system itself' (p.65).
- 5 Guiseppe Bonura in Invito alla lettura di Calvino, (Milan, 1985) writes that the travellers use 'i mazzi dei tarocchi come un sistema di segni, come una lingua: ogni figura impressa nella carta ha un senso polivalente come lo ha una parola, il cui esatto significato si desume dal contesto in cui viene pronunciata', (p.91).
- 6 Schneider also notes the reversal inherent to the reading of the cards but interprets it differently: 'the castle and tavern dining rooms seem to belong to an afterworld, and the inhabitants to be dead souls, reviewing their past. In turning to the past, their fortune telling overturns the usual tarot focus on the future. This is noteworthy, since in other respects, Calvino adheres to the rules of tarot divination. But perhaps Calvino's tarot readers, in some mysterious way, already see their futures as past.' (p.74).
- 7 In his preface to Orlando Furioso, Calvino writes: 'non si deve dimenticare che i giochi, da quelli infantili a quelli degli adulti, hanno sempre un fondamento serio, sono

soprattutto tecniche d'addestramento di facoltà e attitudine che saranno necessarie nella vita' (p.xxv).

- 8 Francesca Bernardini Napoletano, I segni nuovi di Italo Calvino : da "Le Cosmicomiche" a "Le città invisibili", (Rome, 1977), p.135.
- 9 See Schneider, pp.75-76.
- 10 John Updike in 'Card Tricks', Hugging the Shore, (London, 1985) pp.463-469, writes that 'Calvino contemplates the death not of that notorious old moribund, the Novel but of the Story itself, of the hopeful impulse that makes beginnings and seeks outcomes and imagines adventures in the middle' (p.464).
- 11 Barthes in 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' remarks: la temporalité n'est qu'une classe structurale du récit (du discours), tout comme dans la langue, le temps n'existe que sous forme de système; du point de vue du récit, ce que nous appelons le temps n'existe pas, ou du moins n'existe que fonctionnellement, comme élément d'un système sémiotique' (p.18). This fictional temporality constructed by narrative is exploited here by Calvino.
- 12 The complexity of Calvino's position on the relationship between writing and the world is made clear if his early essays, 'Il midollo del leone' (1955) and 'La sfida al labirinto' (1962) where he espouses a positive notion of literature's ability to intervene in reality are compared with his later essays where he appears to regard literature as a more circumscribed, self referential activity. His interview with Gregory Lucente dating from 1984 seems to suggest a return by Calvino to his earlier position although this is probably belied by his fictional output.
- 13 In Una pietra sopra pp.310-323, (p.312).
- 14 See Calvino, Lezioni americane, p.90.
- 15 Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in Illuminations, (Suffolk, 1970), pp.83-109, (p.94).
- 16 In 'Cibernetica e fantasmi', p.174.
- 17 See 'Cibernetica e fantasmi' p.177 where Calvino discusses the 'gioco combinatorio' of all narrative and the effect of the single combination.
- 18 See Schneider, p.83, who discusses the idea of the debasement of the original through its reproduction.
- 19 Andrews, p.275.

- 20 For a discussion of the 'You' see Cesare Segre, 'Se una notte d'inverno uno scrittore sognasse un aleph di dieci colori', in Strumenti Critici, (1979), 177-214.
- 21 Gerard Genette, Nouveau discours du récit, p.92.
- 22 Oriana Fallaci, Lettera ad un bambino mai nato, (Milan, 1975) and Fulvio Tomizza, L'amicizia, (Milan, 1980). Both texts are structured round the call to the absent 'you' figure, a constant feature, although not always explicit, of the texts we have studied.
- 23 See chapter 1, pp.36-38.
- 24 Patricia Waugh in Metafiction remarks on the feigned element of 'histoire': 'a "story" cannot exist without a teller. The apparent impersonality of histoire is always finally personal, finally discours.' (27)
- 25 Jonathan Culler, 'Apostrophe' in The Pursuit of Signs, (London, 1981), pp.135-154.
- 26 Similarly, Paul de Man in 'Autobiography as De-facement' argues that prosopopeia, the addressing of the absent or dead, constitutes the central rhetorical figure of autobiography. See esp. pp.925-926.
- 27 See Segre, pp.177-180.
- 28 Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett, (Baltimore and London, 1974) and Umberto Eco, Lector in fabula: la cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi, (Milan, 1979) esp. pp.50-66.
- 29 Hermes/Mercury as Calvino points out in Lezioni Americane is 'il dio della comunicazione e delle mediazioni'. He goes on: 'Mercurio, con le ali ai piedi, leggero e aereo, abile e agile e adattabile e disinvolto, stabilisce le relazioni degli dèi tra di loro e quelle tra gli dèi e gli uomini, tra le leggi universali e i casi individuali, tra le forze della natura e le forme della cultura, tra tutti gli oggetti del mondo e tra tutti i soggetti pensanti. Quale migliore patrono potrei scegliere per la mia proposta di letteratura?' (50-51).
- 30 Barthes in 'From Work to Text' in Textual Strategies pp.73-81 compares the monistic 'work' to the plural 'text', writing that 'the text might well take as its motto the words of the man possessed by devils: "My name is legion, for we are many" (Mark 5:9)' (p.77). See also chapter 7, pp.298-302.

- 31 A similar idea is developed by Genette in 'L'utopie littéraire', in Figures 1, (Paris, 1966), pp.123-132.
- 32 See Segre, p.188.
- 33 In his preface to Il sentiero dei nidi del ragno, (Turin, 1964). Calvino writes: 'finché il primo libro non è scritto, si possiede quella libertà di cominciare che si può usare una sola volta nella vita, il primo libro già ti definisce mentre tu in realtà sei ancora lontano dall'esser definito, e questa definizione poi dovrai portartela dietro per la vita cercando di darne conferma o approfondimento o correzione o smentita ma mai più non riuscendo a prescindere' (22). The strategy of instigating a series of multiple beginnings aims to avoid the definition of the 'I' through its taking up a position in discourse.
- 34 Hutcheon writes that 'in self-conscious parodic literature, the reader-character identification circuit is often broken. It is sacrificed in order to engage the reader in an active dialogue with the generic modes of his time, an exercise that is usually only the writers. By reminding the reader of the book's identity as artifice, the text parodies his expectations, his desire for verisimilitude, and forces him to an awareness of his own role in creating the universe of fiction' (139). It may be argued, however, that this is also a prime strategy for the author's assertion of authority over the reader.
- 35 See also 'I livelli della realtà in letteratura' (esp. p.312) where Calvino subjugates the experience of the reader to the power of the 'Io scrivo'.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Deadly Games - narration and murder in

Todo modo and Il nome della rosa

Perhaps the only feature common to the texts which we have so far studied is that they each betray some anxiety regarding the question of identity, and demonstrate, in different ways, the precarious and provisional construct of the self. This anxiety is figured, particularly, in the images of death which proliferate in what was assumed to be a testament to life. First person narrative, therefore, seems to incorporate the annihilation of the subject at the very point at which it should celebrate its emergence and triumph. The shift which we have witnessed from first person narrative as the narrative of the subject in history to the type of narrative in which the story of the subject takes place overtly in and through language, has not eliminated the idea of the quest for identity as a major structuring element, but has increasingly reflected the problematics of a quest which uncovers the dangers posed to the self through its representation in discourse, rather than discovering a unified self. Historical referentiality and sheer textuality have been demonstrated to provide shaky props on which to bolster a fragmented subject. History is itself a discursive entity and even an awareness of the strategies which would undermine the authority of discourse, fails to permit the self to be recognised as the source of its own text. Thus we have seen



that the text becomes a surrendering to death and the narrative which would ward off death becomes its harbinger. Calvino's attempt to rescue and recuperate the death of the self from discourse in Se una notte through an avowed strategy of concealment has been seen to fail, for the I's rejection of and withdrawal from the symbolic order can only be represented by means of recourse to that very order of representation. At this point, it might seem that we have reached an impasse, whereby the self is condemned to an existence of laceration and dismemberment before being obliged to acknowledge its final loss. However, if the inevitable fate of the I is loss in its confrontation with the Other, perhaps one final strategy open to it, in order to parry this ultimate blow, might be to attempt a narrative which would narrate the death, not of the self, but indeed, of the other.

The archetypal vehicle for such an enterprise would obviously be the detective/murder novel which, as we shall see, incorporates into its structure many of the issues which are of concern to us. Stefano Tani, in The Doomed Detective, examines the use made of the detective novel in contemporary Italian and American fiction, including Calvino's Se una notte in this category.<sup>1</sup> This choice may, at first, seem puzzling for this novel is clearly not a classic tale of murder and suspense in which the detective triumphs over the perpetrator of a bloody crime, as we know he must, and in doing so re-establishes order

in the world.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in Calvino's novel, images of carnage do abound, but the 'corpse' is no longer a human body but the text.<sup>3</sup> According to Tani, the criminal is no longer contained within the text but is the writer himself, whereas the reader assumes the role of detective and seeks to piece together the fragments of the text and unravel the mystery. The ludic structure of the novel lends itself to this activity by intensifying the hermeneutic performance which necessarily accompanies any act of reading. Tani argues that Calvino's use of the genre represents the absolute subversion of the traditional detective form, yet he fails to perceive that by placing the struggle for mastery between the writer and reader outside the text, he eschews the problematics of narrative and language through which this struggle is enacted. Tani recognises Calvino's strategy as an attempt to assert the self through the eradication of otherness, but interprets it as a radical departure rather than as profoundly nostalgic. If the self is to challenge its death in discourse, it must encounter the Other where the Other is itself represented. Given that the subject has been unable to effect authorship of its own life, it remains to be seen whether or not it can affirm its subjectivity through the authorship of someone else's death.

It may be argued that the significance of murder lies in the association of the notion of self-affirmation with that of transgression.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, it suggests that the emergence of

the self can only be achieved through the transgressive rupturing of the symbolic order. Such a perspective demands that the murderer become the creator, the origin of his criminal act, and thus accede to a position of transcendence. The act of murder, however, requires recognition or representation so that the subject's impulse to self-affirmation may be confirmed. It is, therefore, in the dialogue between the subject/author of the crime and the subject/object of the representation that the quest for transcendence must be articulated.

That murder is transgressive indicates that the act of murder must be considered as a collective phenomenon. Consequently, when the social order has been disrupted or transgressed, the breach caused by the murder must be subject to an act of recuperation by the dominant order. The dominant order seeks redress and, therefore, an area of conflict is mapped out between the individual and the collective where the latter seeks to assert its authority over the former through the establishment of individual guilt, in order to remove responsibility from itself. The perpetrator of the crime is thus forced to adopt strategies of concealment in order to retain his authority over his act. We must now examine these processes of transgression and concealment in order to establish the possibility of self-affirmation through the creative act of homicide.

In the traditional detective/murder tale, the structure of the narrative asserts the primacy of the dominant order by means of its resolution.<sup>5</sup> There is a movement from mystery to elucidation, a movement which reveals the identity of the murderer and makes explicit his crime. This recurrent structure makes traditional detective fiction the most codified of narrative modes. There is a crime, a criminal and a detective, and we know from the outset that the detective will catch the criminal on account of his superior powers of reasoning and of the psychological consistency of the killer. There is always a motive, for classic detective fiction does not allow for casual killing, and there are always suspects from whose midst the murderer will finally be singled out. The novel is strewn with clues to the identity of the killer, but, normally, these will only be perceived by the more able look of the detective.

In many ways, the detective novel intensifies the hermeneutic procedure inherent to every act of reading and is generally more satisfying because it is known that meaning will inevitably be found. It is a mode which demands closure, and achieves closure in its certainty regarding issues of motivation and more particularly identity. The novel commences with the revealing of the victim's identity, and ends with the naming of the murderer. Once this has been achieved, order has been restored and the transgression has been healed and exorcised. The aim of the text is to restore and comfort, and as such, is

deeply nostalgic. Nevertheless, if we look more closely at the representation of murder in detective fiction, we shall see that the situation is somewhat more complex.

Todorov in his essay 'Typologie du roman policier', quoting Butor, notes:

'tout roman policier est bâti sur deux meurtres dont le premier n'est que l'occasion du second dans lequel il est la victime du meurtrier pur et impunissable, du détective' et que 'le récit superpose deux séries temporelles: les jours de l'enquête qui commencent au crime et les jours du drame qui mènent à lui'.<sup>6</sup>

These remarks are highly suggestive for they draw attention, firstly, to the role of the double in the detective novel and, secondly, to the two temporal orders which necessarily co-exist.

The detective is figured as the murderer's double in the sense that he must reconstruct the other's pattern of thought in order to become himself the 'murderer'.<sup>7</sup> The murderer, in turn, becomes the victim, for he is imprisoned by the pattern of thought through which he would have transgressed. The implication is that the murderer's original act could not exceed the symbolic order for the detective is able to demonstrate this act as already read. The murderer can, therefore, no longer claim originality, for his act is seen to lie outside the fictions of his motivations. However, although the detective, the representative of the symbolic order, is able to tame the act of transgression by reassimilating it into an existing pattern,

the fact that he is able to do so introduces an element of the uncanny which may be discerned despite the apparent logic of the hermeneutic procedure. This duality is perceived by Tani who recognises the conflict between the creative and resolvent aspects of the narratives of Poe, the founder of modern detective fiction.<sup>8</sup> The act of creativity or murder must be appropriated by the detective who only succeeds in exorcising the transgression through making it his own. The transgression is thus only partially repressed through its assimilation into the symbolic order. While this element of the uncanny remains visible to an extent in the fictions of Poe and later of Conan Doyle, in the work of Agatha Christie, the power of logic triumphs to produce a narrative free from the spectre of homicidal desire. Here, the act of murder is robbed of its transgressive drive, for it is shown to be an act without consequence, merely the occasion for the dominant order to assert itself over the subject.<sup>9</sup>

Todorov's second point regarding the existence of two temporal orders is interesting for it demonstrates the fundamental role of narrative in the exorcism of the transgressive. The first temporal level is that leading up to the crime whereas the second takes its starting point from the crime, and is the story of the investigation and resolution. Of the two stories, Todorov writes, '*la première, celle du crime, est en fait l'histoire d'une absence: sa caractéristique la plus*

juste est qu'elle ne peut être immédiatement présente dans le livre'.<sup>10</sup> The second, however, 'c'est une histoire qui n'a aucune importance en elle-même, qui sert seulement de médiateur entre le lecteur et l'histoire du crime'<sup>11</sup>. He correctly perceives that the murder must, of necessity, take place elsewhere beyond the immediate gaze. It must bear an unknown quality, shrouded in mystery, for at the time of happening, it is beyond meaning and, so, cannot be witnessed or represented. Todorov is mistaken, however, to suggest that the second story, where the mystery is unravelled, is of no intrinsic importance, for it is through this second story, the narrative itself, that the transgression comes to be represented, tamed and re-integrated into the symbolic. It is through this second act that the murder, conceived of originally as an absence, may be made (however illusorily) present. It is narrative which makes murder a meaningful act, but does so through incorporating it into the symbolic. The detective story is an enactment of the attempt to establish mastery which refuses to concede the position of authorship or origin to the perpetrator of the crime.

The detective novel with its emphasis on origin and on identity seems to parallel the quest which we have noted as central to first person narrative as the writing of the self. In both, there is a 'crime' which is figured in terms of absence and loss, anterior to the attempt to recuperate this loss and establish signification and origin. Tani's remarks on the form



of the traditional detective novel seem to underline this similarity, he writes:

the traditional detective novel presents a reconstruction of the past and ends when this reconstruction has been fulfilled. To reconstruct the past is to go back to a point (the one of the crime) about which the detective is concerned. There must be a fixed point otherwise the regressing in time would be infinite. So to go back in time is equal to finding a criminal, to unravelling a mystery (45).

Likewise, first person narrators either go back in time in order to unravel their own mystery only to uncover their deaths inscribed in the symbolic order of narrative, or attempt to recuperate a sense of origin by apparently disrupting the symbolic order, but finding that their only means of representation lies within that very order. However, in the roman-memoir, unlike in detective fiction, the mystery is never fully unravelled, for there is no satisfactory solution to be found. The point to which first person narrators may be said to regress, is the point at which they entered language and were forced to recognise the moment of their collision with the other.

Not all detective novels adopt the traditional mode and Tani turns his attention to novels which exploit the structure of detective fiction by subverting it, in order to produce a narrative which rejects the domestication of the traditional closed form.

In his study of post-modernist detective fiction, Tani points to the way in which the closed structure of the traditional detective genre and its fetishisation of the solution is turned upon itself by the refusal to accept a closed system of meaning.<sup>12</sup> He examines the means by which certain texts exploit the rigid genre codification only to shatter it by undermining the conciliatory lure offered by the solution as a monolithic representation of reality. Tani divides these subversive texts into three categories according to the way in which they destabilise the hermeneutic rationale and the solution, its inevitable product.

The first category he refers to as the 'innovative' where the solution is not arrived at through the superior reasoning powers of the detective, but rather by chance.<sup>13</sup> There does seem to be an order to events, but the perception of this can only be fortuitous.

Secondly, he identifies the 'deconstructive' category which more acutely problematises reality and the detective's relationship to it.<sup>14</sup> Here, there is no possibility of a solution but only a plethora of bewildering possibilities. Tani's definition merits closer attention, he writes:

The detective is unable to impose a meaning, an interpretation of the outside occurrences he is asked, as a sleuth, to solve and interpret. Reality is so tentacular and full of clues that the detective risks his sanity as he tries to find a solution...At the end, he (or she) quits sizing up clues and admits the mystery; he

discovers that in the meanwhile, even if he has not found an objective solution, he has at least grown and understood something about his own identity. In a very Poesque way, the confrontation is no longer between a detective and a murderer, but between the detective and reality, or between the detective's mind and his sense of identity, which is falling apart, between the detective and the 'murderer' in his own self (76).

The 'deconstructive' detective novel thus displaces the transgressive act, for it no longer maintains a simple dichotomy between the murderer, as purveyor of evil, and the detective as upholder of justice. The transgression returns and cannot be recuperated by logic or reason, for the detective's self is placed in direct confrontation with an order which is unable to yield the assurance of a stable identity. The detective's malevolent double is no longer externalised in the figure of the murderer, but is seen to form part of the detective himself, and hence, of the order which he represents. Guilt cannot be considered as an isolated, individual phenomenon whose source can be re-traced. The narrative becomes a narrative of fragmented possibilities where there is no hierarchy of meaning and the detective no longer stands as guarantor of a fixed order and redeemer of the transgression. He becomes the murderer's second victim through his inability to resuscitate the logic and motivation of the original crime. That this form of the detective novel does not ensure the transcendence of the self through murder on account of the detective's defeat is a point to which we shall return.<sup>15</sup>

The third category identified by Tani is that of the 'metafictional' detective novel to which reference has already been made in relation to Se una notte.<sup>16</sup> Here the writer has turned murderer and the reader detective as he tries to piece together the corpse/text mutilated by the writer's strategies which seek to confound all narrative logic. The dubious nature of this strategy has been discussed in the previous chapter, but it is interesting to note that the ground on which the conflict between murderer and detective is fought is that of the text or the impulse to representation. In all detective novels, the question of representation is paramount, for it is here that the unspeakable act must be articulated or again silenced.

Tani sees all three of his categories as combining to create an anti-detective novel. The significance of the adoption of this form by contemporary writers is noted by Patricia Waugh who remarks that 'in the post-modern period, the detective plot is being used to express not order but the irrationality of both the surface of the world and of its deep structures'.<sup>17</sup> It is to this representation of reality in which the irrational is openly acknowledged that we must now turn the focus of our discussion of first person narrative. We shall examine two novels which adopt the over-coded genre of detective fiction but seek to subvert it while, unlike in the work of Calvino, still retaining a purportedly realist referent. Sciascia's Todo modo and Eco's Il

nome della rosa both deal with the problematisation of the self in its confrontation with a reality which is recognised as having no definitive solution.

In his essay, 'Typologie du roman policier', Todorov notes that while the primary 'histoire' of detective fiction necessarily eschews any element of literary self-consciousness, the second 'histoire', on the other hand, 'est non seulement censée tenir compte de la réalité du livre mais elle est précisément l'histoire de ce livre même'<sup>18</sup>. Even in the most traditional form of the detective novel, there tends to exist a degree of self consciousness present in the text, drawing the reader's attention to the narrative as a linguistic reconstruction of events. This is perhaps related to the impossibility of omniscience in the detective novel. At the time when the murder is committed, the narrator cannot know who the guilty party is, for the whole point of the genre lies in dispelling the mystery. The writing of the detective novel, therefore, becomes the writing of how a logical, causal narrative is constructed through a primary reading. Its writing becomes a repetition not only of the crime, but also of the resolute investigation which serve as rehearsals to the narrative itself. It may be asserted therefore that rather than containing two temporal levels, the detective genre, in fact, embodies three: the time leading up to the crime, the time of the investigation

and, finally, the time of the narrative which ensures the victory of the detective. The notion of repetition is important to an understanding of the detective's procedure, for although the detective is essentially a reader, indeed an ideal reader, for he is able to elicit full meaning from the signs of the murderer's text, he seeks ultimately to rewrite the text with the added appendix of the solution. His hermeneutic skill becomes a creative act in itself, for it cancels out the creative impulse of the murderer and, as we have noted, makes him the victim. We shall now examine these aspects of detective fiction as they appear in Sciascia's novel.

In Todo modo, the nameless 'io narrante' specifically draws attention to the fact that he is in the process of constructing a written account of events which have already taken place. He writes: 'chi leggerà questo manoscritto o, se mai sarà pubblicato, questo libro, si domanderà... (99), underlining not only the avowed literariness of the text, but also indicating that the text has been written in order to be read, therefore seeking some response from the other. Although renowned as a painter, the nameless narrator claims also to be a writer of 'gialli' and states 'li scrivo e li pubblico con pseudonimo' (70).<sup>19</sup> Already it can be discerned that the narrator of Todo modo not only wishes to remain anonymous, but is consciously at pains to obscure his identity. In the course of the novel, he is recognised by the other characters on account of his fame, yet he

refuses to yield anything to the reader in terms of biographical information. His I flickers, therefore, between that of the anonymous producer of discourse and that of a more fully 'embodied' persona whose identity is constructed in a precise historical context.<sup>20</sup>

More significant than the scattered allusions to the literariness of the text is the fact that the discourse of the novel refers constantly to other books and, in particular, to other writers.<sup>21</sup> The novel opens with a quotation from Debenedetti, and throughout the novel we find quotations from and references to Pirandello, Kant, Pascal, Voltaire, Freud, Mallarmé and many others.<sup>22</sup> It is not an uncommon feature of detective fiction to allude to its status as fiction although this effect is often achieved through the avowed declaration of its dissimilarity to detective fiction, i.e. by making a claim that what is happening is real and not part of a detective story. In Todo modo, the result is somewhat different, for the constant references to other books and the large sections of the novel devoted to discourse on books, creates a set of parameters in which the self is constructed through a proximity to, and absorption of, artistic forms. Ricciarda Ricorda writes:

la citazione arricchisce effettivamente il testo di un surplus di senso e lo dota di un secondo piano espressivo, autonomo sebbene di continuo intersecato con quello realistico.  
(75)

Ricorda argues that the level on which the literary quotations



function should be regarded as offering a higher level of meaning. It is the level of mediation through which 'real' events are filtered in order to assume a more profound significance. We would prefer to suggest, however, that rather than offering a higher level of interpretation, the extensive use of literary allusions creates the boundaries in which events and the self may be comprehended and actualised. Rather than opening out the field of interpretation, these allusions serve to limit the context of interpretation.

This seems to be the view of don Gaetano, the catholic priest who is in charge of the retreat at which the narrator happens to arrive. Don Gaetano compares his celibacy to a work of art, stating:

i limiti e le preclusioni espressive ne sono la forma, non sono limiti e preclusioni. Allo stesso modo la castità è la forma più sublime cui l'amor proprio può accedere; un far diventar arte la vita (41).

This seems to lead us to the central problem of Todo modo, and all detective fiction, which is the relationship between identity, form and language, and the possibility of transcendence expressed here by don Gaetano's reference to the sublime. His remarks suggest that transcendence is possible through adherence to form and that form, in turn, permits authorship. To attempt to verify this assertion, it is necessary to examine images of authorship within the text.

Like many detective novels, Todo modo is set in an enclosed community, in this case a monastic retreat. The necessity of this type of setting is that it precludes the possibility of the crime being committed by someone from outside this closed group. The suspects, therefore, are known and the murderer is present from the outset although his identity remains obscure until the dénouement.<sup>23</sup>

In Todo modo, three murders take place and the assumption, therefore, is that they have some causal link.<sup>24</sup> This is very much the approach of the police who arrive after the first murder and who insist on the primacy of the motive in any murder investigation. Scalambri, the police inspector, remarks to a government minister who has doubted the existence of a motive, 'c'è sempre, signor ministro, c'è sempre; futile, folle, invisibile all'occhio della normalità; ma c'è sempre' (63), and the novel terminates with his ironic re-affirmation of the necessity of the motive, even though the police investigators have proved unequal to the task of uncovering it, and of preventing the subsequent murders.<sup>25</sup> The identity of the inspector and the authority of his office depend on the existence of the motive and on the possibility of uncovering this motive through the exercise of reason and the evaluation of clues. Conversely, the desire of the minister to believe in a motiveless crime betrays a wish not to have to identify with the victim, for to do so would be to figure himself in an identical position. It

also parallels his desire to have the murderer come from outside the community so that the transgression may be tamed by its association with the other.<sup>26</sup>

However, as in many detective novels, the 'detective' is not a representative of the police force, but an outsider, who yet has access to the closed circle and who becomes more familiar with the circumstances of the crime. In Todo modo, it is the first person narrator who ostensibly takes on this role, but, as we shall see, he fails to fulfil his function of revealing the complete sequence of events to the reader.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas the narrator had merely chanced upon the religious retreat, the other residents of the community are all well-connected members of the ruling class who gather each year in the guise of spiritual penitents, but who, in fact, meet in order to confirm their positions of authority and organise deals with the aim of advancing this authority. The narrator initially accuses don Gaetano of 'mauvaise foi' for encouraging the spiritual pretext on which the group meets, but gradually he is forced to recognise the degree of his own complicity with the ruling elite. As an artist whose success is based on the desire of the ruling class to accumulate both wealth and prestige through the acquisition of 'art', he must acknowledge that his art is merely a commodity used as a unit of exchange by a certain group. The system of class values is seen to be self-validating and self-

perpetuating and finally, the narrator asks of the ruling class: 'e che cosa dirigeva in concreto, effettivamente? Una ragnatela nel vuoto, la propria labile ragnatela. Anche se di fili d'oro' (74). As the murder enquiry progresses, a web of intrigue is discovered which links the first two murders as part of a spiral of political corruption and double dealing, but the identity of the murderer is never found. It is, however, the third murder, that of don Gaetano, which will prove most significant and through which the discourse of murder, the self and the other will be articulated.

The image of the double, present in the relationship between the detective and the murderer, has already been noted, but in Todo modo, the situation is made more complex by the 'detective's' assumed failure to reproduce the murderer's mode of thought and trap the criminal. However, the image of the double, as it occurs in the narrative, is essential to the issues at stake. Here, the detective's double is not ostensibly the murderer, but the third victim, don Gaetano, and much of the novel is taken up with conversations between the two. As Tani points out, the physical presence of don Gaetano is characterised in particular by its ineffability.<sup>28</sup> He is present in every corner of the retreat, but seems to appear out of thin air only to disappear just as discreetly and mysteriously. The narrator writes:

quando se n'era già andato, la sua immagine  
persisteva come negli occhi chiusi o nel vuoto;

sicché non si riusciva mai a cogliere il momento preciso, reale in cui s'allontanava. Che era poi un effetto conseguente a quella specie di sdoppiamento di cui ho tentato di dire. Il fatto è che stando con lui si stabiliva come una sfera di ipnosi (17-18).

The type of 'sdoppiamento' to which the narrator refers, is a comparison he has made to the children's game in which the child stares at a black silhouette with a small white dot in the centre, looks up to the sky and continues to see the silhouette only now it has become white and diaphanous. This ethereal aura attributed to don Gaetano's corporal presence is figured as disquieting and macabre, for it is at odds with the material, worldly ambiance of the retreat.

There then follows a series of images which increase this feeling of unease and their complexity is revealing. Don Gaetano who, from the outset, is characterised by the imposing nature of his presence, grows further in stature as he greets his guests:

Pur in atteggiamento di filiale devozione, di gioia e a tratti d'ilarità, don Gaetano manteneva un distacco, una freddezza, una severità che mi suscitavano sentimento di piena ammirazione. Altro che cardinale: poteva anch'essere il papa. (21)

Shortly afterwards, the narrator notes the degree of complicity which has grown up between himself and the priest but also 'che la sua immagine fosse, più vecchia e saggia e consumata, la mia cui aspiravo' (24). Then whilst don Gaetano is relating the history of the retreat to the narrator, he draws attention to a

copy of Manetti's 'Tentazione di Sant'Antonio' upon which the narrator remarks, 'ma quel che più colpiva del diavolo, era il fatto che aveva gli occhiali à pince-nez, dalla montatura nera' (29). The significance of this is then made apparent as he realises that the spectacles worn by don Gaetano are the same as those worn by the devil in the painting: 'i suoi occhiali erano una copia esatta di quelli del diavolo' (30). The series of images takes on an even more sinister tone when don Gaetano points out that Buttafuoco, the copier of the original painting, whose very name bears an infernal imprint, had made a self-portrait of his representation of the devil.

The chain of imagery thus elevates don Gaetano from his position of filial subservience to that of the Pope and the Devil. Through the allusions to art, the narrator also takes on a diabolic persona which is confirmed by the image of the priest as his alter ego. Important too is the image of the artist as copier, a role which subverts the notion of authorship, but which becomes diabolical through the dissemination of a false image or icon. Thus, the narrator's self is imaged both as God the Father and the Devil, an ambivalent but not impossible identity.<sup>29</sup>

Freud, in his essay 'A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis', discusses the manner in which God and the Devil function as images of the child's ambivalent relationship to the father.<sup>30</sup> Split into two separate entities, they originally

represented the child's antithetical emotions towards a single being. God and the Devil must consequently be seen as one figure. In relation to the imaging of God, he writes:

We know that God is a father-substitute; or more correctly, that he is an exalted father; or, yet again, that he is a copy of a father as he is seen and experienced in childhood - by individuals in their own childhood and by mankind in its prehistory as the father of the primitive and primal horde. Later on in life the individual sees his father as something different and lesser. But the ideational image belonging to his childhood is preserved and becomes merged with the inherited memory-traces of the primal father to form the individual's idea of God.<sup>3</sup>

Read in this context, the narrator's relationship with don Gaetano bears the traces of an archaic conflict which is at once personal and part of the collective. The effect of doubling indicates the narrator's desire to usurp the role which don Gaetano is perceived to fulfil, and suggests the re-enactment of the original Oedipal conflict; the conflict between the self and the other.

We have already noted the sense of unease which pervades Todo modo. In his essay 'The Uncanny', Freud states that this feeling of unease is often associated with the idea of the double.<sup>32</sup> He sees the double as a form of regression to an earlier phase of the self's psychic development as, in fact, are all feelings of the uncanny.

They are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a



regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people.<sup>33</sup>

The narrator's own impressions, after having been struck by the glasses worn by the Devil, seem to confirm this idea of return. He has 'l'impressione di aver già visto qualcosa di simile, senza ricordare quando e dove, [che] conferiva al diavolo occhialuto un che di misterioso e di pauroso: come l'avess[e] visto in sogno o nei visionari terrori dell'infanzia' (29).

The sense of the uncanny which may be said to pervade the narrative is not due to the occurrence of the first two murders, but to the ambivalent relationship between the narrator and don Gaetano. In addition to the chain of physical similarities which link the two characters, there exists also an effect of doubling on a mental level. Freud also remarks on the importance of the link between both physical and psychological resemblance:

We have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another...so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self.<sup>34</sup>

The problematisation of the relationship between the self and reality was noted by Tani as one of the constitutive features of deconstructive anti-detective fiction. However, in Todo modo,

it is the detective who becomes victimised by the eventual victim's ability to reconstruct his mental processes and, in a sense, to 'kill' him. This is most notable on two occasions. The first is when don Gaetano correctly deduces the type of Mary Magdalene which the narrator would have painted were he to have undertaken the task, and the second is when don Gaetano seems to anticipate a conversation between himself and the narrator by leaving a copy of Pascal's Pensées marked at the apposite point by the narrator's bed.<sup>35</sup>

The first instance is interesting, for it challenges the notion of authorship by implying that the narrator's production bears not the originality of genius, but the highly formalised work of a copyist. The painter discovers his work already complete in the mind of don Gaetano. The second example of the priest's power seems to exceed even the most advanced capacities of logic, and the appearance of the book cannot be explained without recourse to a more sinister order of things. The law of the Father seems absolute for not only does don Gaetano possess the key to the innermost recesses of the narrator's mind, but it is also suggested that as confessor to all the suspects (except paradoxically the narrator), he must know the identity of the killer.<sup>36</sup>

The role of confessor is particularly suitable for the figure of don Gaetano as it enables him to function as the Father

by receiving the penitent's call to the Other and then ensuring contrition and absolution. He functions in a similar way with the narrator, albeit on a supposedly secular level in the course of their dialogue which fills out the narrative. Just as Freud notes the centrality of repetition in the uncanny, don Gaetano points out to the narrator the compulsive nature of his relationships with women, and seems to indicate the superiority of his celibacy in that he has disrupted this cycle of compulsion. His life has become art and he has become its author. The problem for the narrator is how to disrupt this cycle of repetition. Predictably, it might be argued, he resorts to killing his father.<sup>37</sup>

This is the solution offered by Tani although he does not see the resolution in Freudian terms.<sup>38</sup> Tani effects a persuasive close reading of the text to show that the third murder was committed by the narrator although he is never found out. That the first person narrator is the murderer represents a subversion of the rules of detective fiction, for the narrator must share his knowledge, however limited, with the reader and make explicit his relationship to the crime.<sup>39</sup> In Todo modo, moreover, the act of murder is specifically linked to the question of authorship. The narrator writes:

Appunto nel delitto non ci si può fermare...non ci si può fermare, intendo, finché non si eliminano gli errori, gli incidenti, le sbavature che si sono verificati commettendo il primo; e poi correggendo con altro delitto, quelli che ancora, imponderabilmente,

insorgano; e così via... Questo, ovviamente, nei delitti il cui autore ha tutto calcolato per riuscire all'impunità. E poiché non c'è calcolo che non abbia un margine in cui l'imponderabile, il fortuito, e insomma la fortuna non giuochino un ruolo fatale (79-80)

Apart from the allusion to the murderer as author of the crime, three main points emerge: the first relates to the compulsive and repetitive nature of murder, the second to the murderer's wish to go undetected and thirdly, to the role of chance in the crime.

Claude Ambroise has written:

Scrivere un romanzo giallo è veramente come trasformare la morte di qualcuno in una esperienza narrabile... In Todo modo, il fatto di scrivere tende addirittura a coincidere, simbolicamente, con l'atto stesso di uccidere.<sup>40</sup>

It can be argued that the level on which they do coincide is that of their shared, repetitive structure. To narrate is to go back and, as we have seen, involves an attempt to exorcise the loss and absence experienced by the self. To murder, it would appear, is to re-stage the killing of the Father, the original act which offered the lure of plenitude to the desiring subject. The self seeks to affirm its identity in the confrontation with the symbolic order and to master this order by conquering its most potent constituent, the Father, and by reproducing the original moment of plenitude.

Ambroise goes on to state that 'Todo modo è una esperienza di recupero della propria identità', but one must question whether this attempt fully succeeds. We never know who committed any of the crimes in Todo modo and, as readers, can only play with the text, constructing our own hypotheses.<sup>41</sup> At the end of the novel, the narrator confesses to the murder of don Gaetano, but the police do not recognise his guilt i.e. his identity, and to murder with the aim of self-affirmation requires recognition by the other for as don Gaetano had earlier remarked, 'le cose che non si sanno, non sono' (35). The narrator does not claim to be guilty of the murder, and if we assume that he had the right, it is perhaps here that the narrator succeeds in subverting the symbolic order.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator claims to be free from the everyday forces which imprison the self, with no worries or fears 'tranne quelle, oscure e irrimediabili, che ho sempre avute, del vivere e per il vivere' (4). He goes on:

e vi si innestavano e diramavano l'inquietudine e l'apprensione per l'atto di libertà che dovevo pur fare: ma leggere e leggermente stordite, come mi trovassi dentro un giuoco di specchi, non ossessivo ma luminoso e quieto come l'ora e i luoghi che percorrevo, pronto a ripetere, a moltiplicare, quando sarebbe scattato, quando avrei voluto farlo scattare, il mio atto di libertà. (4)

As the writer of a retrospective account of events, the narrator must know what his 'atto di libertà' consisted of. It is tempting to view this in the terms which we have suggested i.e.

of killing the Father, and the novel's closure on the lengthy quotation from Gide's Les caves du Vatican pushes further an identification between the narrator's 'atto di libertà' and Lafcadio's 'act gratuit'.<sup>42</sup> Lafcadio's attempt fails as he is forced to recognise the impossibility of his desire so, consequently, it is perhaps mistaken to presume that the narrator's act of freedom consists in committing what seems to be the ultimate transgressive act. The detective novel with its fetishisation of the solution traditionally eschews the importance of the murder itself, and instead, focuses on the resolvent aspect of the crime. The ultimate transgression becomes not the murder, but the failure to detect the murderer and re-establish the primacy of the dominant order. It can perhaps be suggested that the narrator's 'atto di libertà' is not constituted by his killing don Gaetano, but by his refusal to seek recognition for his act (killing or not killing) from the symbolic. Consequently, his narrative can be read as a repetition of his challenge to that order by refusing to close the text and confirm the notion of a fixed identity based on the concepts of guilt and innocence. This refusal also constitutes a refusal to exorcise the uncanny by permitting limitless play around the point at which the self rejects recognition by the symbolic.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator appears to have a sudden moment of inspiration which causes him to uncover the

solution to his 'problema'. He declines to surrender his insight, indicating only that the solution is reminiscent of the solution arrived at by Dupin, in Poe's 'The Purloined Letter'. Poe's short story, although considered to be one of the prototypes for detective fiction in the last century, is not the story of a murder. Instead, it deals with the recovery of a letter which had fallen into the wrong hands and which Dupin has to locate, the official upholders of law and order having failed in this task. Dupin succeeds through finding the letter in a hiding place so exposed to the gaze that it appears not to be one. Having secured the return of the letter, Dupin cannot resist a moment of hubris and replaces the purloined letter with a substitute which will allow the thief to glean the identity of Dupin. Not overtly concerned with murder, the tale is nevertheless concerned with power and the relation between the self and the other. The thief commits his crime in full view of his victim who is rendered helpless for fear of exposing her secret. As Dupin, therefore, remarks 'Here then...you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete - the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber'.<sup>43</sup> Power demands recognition by the other and when this look is denied the thief's position disintegrates. The narrator (incidentally not Dupin) notes that 'it is this possession and not any employment of the letter which bestows the power. With the employment, power departs'.<sup>44</sup> The result of Dupin's hubris is that he employs the letter to ensure recognition by the thief,



of his superior intellect. Unlike Dupin, the narrator of Todo modo refuses to succumb to the temptation of allowing the other to identify his position.

In his seminar on 'The Purloined Letter', Lacan sees the letter as a 'pur signifiant' which only accrues meaning according to the position it occupies in the drama.<sup>45</sup> Its importance, however, is due to the fact that it also constitutes the identity of the beholder according to the position in which he stands to its authority:

L'ascendant que le ministre tire de la situation ne tient donc pas à la lettre, mais, qu'il le sache ou non, au personnage qu'elle lui constitue.<sup>46</sup>

The fault of the minister/thief and Dupin is believing that they have assumed the position of 'maître absolu' or exalted father in relation to the letter, for, as Lacan points out, this position is located solely in the imaginary. While they fall prey to the lure of the symbolic and the false position of transcendence, the narrator of Todo modo refuses this position by declining to close the hermeneutic sequence through imposing a resolution. It is, therefore, through this refusal to reveal and establish meaning that the narrator is able to rescue the self from its struggle with the symbolic.

The absence of logic and the failure of reason which seem to underpin Todo modo, also feature prominently in Eco's Il nome della rosa. Eco's work is also a detective novel and like

Sciascia, Eco uses the conventions of the genre as a means of subversion in order to lead the narrative on to other fields of enquiry. Like Todo modo, the novel is told in the first person, but rather than depriving the reader of biographical information, the narrator bombards the reader with details of his identity and the geographical and historical background to the narrative. The reader does not have to wonder about who the teller of the tale is, for it seems that he reveals himself from the outset. We shall see, however, that the question of identity is fundamental to Il nome della rosa but, once again, the parameters in which the debate is situated have been displaced. Firstly, therefore, we shall explore the biographical and historical context in which the narrator is located before going on to deal with the text which he is purported to have written. Finally, we shall attempt to elucidate some of the complexities and contradictions which emerge from the uneasy juxtaposition of the subject and his text.

Contrary to what we have noted in the texts previously studied, the narrator of Il nome della rosa is well and truly named, for names are by no means in short supply in this narrative. The name of the narrator is Adso da Melk and we soon learn that, at the time of his narrative, he was a young novice returning to his native Germany in the company of Guglielmo da Baskerville, a senior English monk, entrusted with the task of effecting a reconciliation between the warring factions of the Church. The novel is set in the latter part of 1327, and the

tumultuous events of the period, the struggle between Church and Empire, are responsible in part for Adso's flight from Italy and, hence, his involvement in the events which he will relate.

Adso's narration, however, takes place at a much later date, somewhere towards the end of the fourteenth century when, as an old man in his cell, he looks back on the events of his youth. The dual perspective which this gap in time introduces, is, as we have noted, very much a part of the traditional roman-mémoires form.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, there is the naivety of the younger, experiencing I who finds himself in medias res while, on the other, there is the more authoritative, mature vision of the older self who is able to look back and construct an ordered narrative out of the disordered events of the past. The importance of this structural feature is commented upon by Eco in the Postille a il nome della rosa, for despite the wisdom of hindsight, Adso never becomes anything other than a naive reader of events and, as we shall discover, the text comes to exceed its narrator.<sup>48</sup>

Adso's narrative relates the series of murders which take place in a Benedictine abbey, somewhere in the north of Italy, during the course of one week in November, 1327. He details the task of Guglielmo to catch the culprit, a task upon which the political struggles of the period constantly encroach. In the Postille, Eco underlines the crucial function which the naivety of the narrator affords in the transmission of complex historical

data to the reader.<sup>49</sup> As an inexperienced foreigner, Adso is as unaware of the upheavals which beset the peninsula as the contemporary reader, and his function is to transcribe the lengthy and often convoluted explanations which Guglielmo offers to him, thus allowing the reader to become acquainted with the period. It is important to stress that it is as a scribe that Adso considers his role to be in the documentation of the past. He serves in this capacity both to Guglielmo, claiming to be his 'scrivano e discepolo al tempo stesso' (22), and more significantly to God the Father as a faithful witness to the events which occurred. He vows that he will relate past events:

ripetendo verbatim quanto vidi e udii, senza azzardarmi a trarne un disegno, come a lasciare a coloro che verranno (se l'Anticristo non li precederà) segni di segni, perchè su di essi si eserciti la preghiera della decifrazione. (21)

Finally, he begs that 'il Signore gli conceda la grazia di essere testimone trasparente'. As a narrator, Adso is not only naive but totally self-effacing. He dare not interpret what he witnessed for that is the work of others. Later in the novel, when the Abbot initiates the novice into the language of precious stones and the multiplicity of their symbolic meaning, he remarks:

Il linguaggio delle gemme è multiforme, ciascuna esprime più verità, a seconda del senso di lettura che si sceglie, a seconda del contesto in cui appaiono. E chi decide quale sia il livello di interpretazione e quale il giusto contesto? Tu lo sai, ragazzo, te l'hanno insegnato: è l'autorità, il commentatore tra tutti più sicuro e più investito di prestigio, e dunque di santità. (451)

Interpretation and the elucidation of meaning are not the task of the novice monk; his is faith. As a scribe, Adso's authority, like the muslim scribe in Se una notte, is invested in God and whatever truth may be gleaned from his manuscript is of divine and not earthly origin. Adso lays no claim to the text. As he indicates, however, God's truth may only be transcribed by means of signs, words which stand for other signs and his account begins, 'in principio era il Verbo e il Verbo era presso Dio e il Verbo era Dio' (19). God and the Word become synonymous and His authority is seen to extend to the Word itself. Throughout our study, we have noticed the extent to which the self which had been posited as the site of authority, has become subject to the authority of discourse, of the Word. Here, the authority vested in the Word is sanctified through its association with the paternal deity thus suggesting a transcendence attached to the word which is denied to the subject. The implications of this are multiple and far-reaching, but before exploring them fully, we must turn to the alternative source of authority upon which Adso draws, the authority of History.

The events documented are precisely dated, but more than this, are situated in a precise historical context. We might argue that Adso documents not only the traumatic happenings of a brief but significant moment of his past, but also the struggles between Church and Empire out of which the modern age was born.

He proceeds with the faith of one writing a chronicle, a witness to his times, leaving a testament for those who follow to decipher.<sup>50</sup> The significance of this should not pass unnoticed for while, on the one hand, Adso, as a witness, acts as a guarantor of the period, on the other, history functions to guarantee the veracity of his account. These two aspects, the personal and the historico-political, serve the purpose of mutual validation, and combine with the authority of the Deity to authenticate the text.

The various strands of authority are brought together by Adso as he sets out to relate his shameful, sexual encounter with the village girl in the monastery kitchen. He begins by invoking the succour of God, the Virgin Mary and all the saints in heaven before continuing:

ma mi sono ripromesso di raccontare su quei fatti lontani, tutta la verità, e la verità è indivisa, brilla della sua stessa perspicuità, e non consente di essere dimidiata dai nostri interessi e dalla nostra vergogna. Il problema è piuttosto di dire cosa avvenne non come ora lo vedo e lo ricordo...ma come lo vidi e sentii allora. E posso farlo con fedeltà di cronista, perché se chiudo gli occhi posso ripetere tutto quanto non solo feci ma pensai in quegli istanti, come se copiassi una pergamena scritta allora. (246)

Adso thus makes recourse to all the sources of authority which we have seen to be typical of first person narrative. His vow of truthfulness is made in the name of God and of his duty as 'cronista', but significantly, he alludes also to the gap between writing and experience, and to his own mnemonic capacities. This

is not the first occasion on which Adso has referred to the feat of memory which his labour betokens:

forse, per comprendere meglio gli avvenimenti  
in cui mi trovai coinvolto, è bene che io  
ricordi quanto stava avvenendo in quello  
scorcio di secolo, così come lo compresi allora  
vivendolo così come lo rammento ora, arricchito  
di altri racconti che ho udito dopo - se pure  
la mia memoria sarà in grado di riannodare le  
fila di tanti e confusissimi eventi. (20)

Adso's statement draws attention not only to the work of memory, but also to the manner in which time, but more particularly other stories, have enriched his memory. This earlier remark suggests a more complex relationship between the subject and the text than that allowed by Adso when he claims to write 'come se copiass[e] una pergamena scritta allora' which implies a belief that writing can reflect life directly. The gap between writing and experience is no longer innocent, but weaves its own plots into the text. It becomes impossible to speak solely of the perspectives of then and now, for it is perhaps in that which lies between that the most crucial perspective is formed. To view life and the chronicle as parallel texts does not necessarily betray a naive stance on the part of the narrator if it allows an exploration of the gaps which lie between.

Two final points which need to be made concerning Adso's relation to his manuscript are that of his relationship with the reader, and the idea that the writing of the text serves as a confession, a catharsis in itself. At one point in the novel, Adso reiterates his pledge to veracity, but adds that this was



not his only motivation nor was it 'per il desiderio (peraltro degnissimo) di ammaestrare i [suoi] lettori futuri; ma anche per liberare la [sua] memoria appassita e stanca di visioni che per tutta la vita l'hanno affannata' (281). The desire for mastery has been a feature common to all the texts which we have studied, whether it be expressed as mastery of the past, the text or the reader, it is always the expression of a desire to master the other. The desire to write for posterity reveals an essentially paternal, procreative relationship to writing in which the self will live on thanks to the organic properties of the text. The final pages of the manuscript, where Adso envisages his own imminent return to dust, will somehow save the self from the dissolution which is forecast in the writing. The concept of the narrative as confession not only situates Adso firmly in the tradition of first person narrative, but also seeks to acquire salvation for the self through writing.<sup>51</sup> A life in words is a life saved by words.

It would seem at this point that Eco has produced a first person narrative which harks back to a more innocent age where the relationship between the I and the text was devoid of conflict. We earlier stated that the text exceeds the narrator, and we can now show the ways in which the text undermines Adso's project of truthfulness to demonstrate the self as product of the text. In the end, it is this purpose which Adso's naivety serves, casting doubt and confusion on to the alleged

transparency of the text.

Adso's fourteenth century manuscript is preceded by a preface, written not by Adso, but by an unnamed I figure, detailing how the medieval manuscript came to print.<sup>52</sup> The reader learns that the text comes not in its original version, but is presented through a series of translations and rewritings whose authenticity cannot be assured due to an involved trail of loss and false attribution. The vicissitudes of the text are documented amidst such a welter of detail that it requires a certain degree of intellectual concentration on the part of the reader to follow and comprehend the circuitous path which leads to the text's publication. The preface is precisely dated, as is the occasion on which the anonymous I first discovered the manuscript. It is revealed that the search for the lost text caused the unnamed I to travel the world before finally securing the text and writing his own version. He writes of his wish to present the text 'come se fosse autentico' (15), ironisizing in advance Adso's claims to veracity and authenticity. He asserts also that he feels 'libero di raccontare, per semplice gusto fabulatorio, la storia di Adso da Melk'. This too will contradict Adso's later claims, for he writes not simply out of pleasure, but as a duty to himself, God and history. The writer of the preface concludes that the pleasure of the text is due to its distant temporal location far from our own cares and worries, for the book 'è storia di libri, non di miserie quotidiane'.

Here, in a gesture of self-referentiality, it is suggested that the narrative is not about medieval monks but about books. The preface prepares for such a reading by alluding to the overtly fictional nature of the narrative and by forming a set of parameters within which Adso's later claims to veracity must be read.

If the fiction is cast into doubt so too is Adso, for he is effectively erased from the first person pronoun by the anonymous I's claim to be writing his story. Finally, it might be argued that the circumstantial detail surrounding the origins of the text has a more complex function than, at first, might appear. Rather than enlightening the reader, this information serves to confuse and disorient, subsequently rendering itself meaningless. Through saying too much, it says nothing at all. The questions which the preface raises regarding authority, authenticity and meaning, seem to contradict the position of Adso on these issues. The preface to his text suggests that narrative is not a transparent medium and that the relationship between the self and language is more complex than the position which he articulates.

Adso's role in the events which he witnesses is a minor one, and it is from the point of view of an onlooker that he writes. On arrival at the monastery, Guglielmo is requested to unravel the circumstances behind the mysterious death of one of the young monks. Death and murder then start to multiply, and it is on

this level that the main plot lies. Consequently, it is within the confines and conventions of the detective genre which we shall now treat the narrative.<sup>53</sup>

Like Todo modo, Il nome della rosa is set in an isolated, monastic community. This self-enclosed setting is typical of the detective genre, for it precludes the possibility of the murderer coming from outside so allows the narrative to focus on the motives and relationships of the characters or suspects who inhabit the enclave.<sup>54</sup> As is common, the detective will be an outsider, removed from the pattern of intrigue and emotion which envelopes the crime. In this case, the detective is Guglielmo da Baskerville whose name playfully evokes the hero of the stories of Conan Doyle. This is the first and most obvious of the many intertextual references which abound in the narrative, and while the reference specifically draws a parallel between the relationship of Guglielmo and Adso and that of Holmes and Watson, it also raises some interesting questions regarding the temporality of fiction.

If we accept that Adso's manuscript belongs to the fourteenth century, its two heroes are logically precursors of Conan Doyle's duo; Holmes and Watson intertextually cite Adso and Guglielmo. Logically, however, this is not the case for as twentieth century readers, we regard the nineteenth century detectives as the precursors of their earlier counterparts and

thus the logic of temporality is reversed through the fiction. The notion of texts speaking through the centuries, and in spite of them, makes each text contemporaneous with its reading and not its writing. Any authority is passed from author to reader. The allusion to the detectives of Conan Doyle escapes Adso, situated within the text, but its significance is obvious to the reader. We are not reading an historical novel.<sup>55</sup>

This discussion may be specious, yet it is the question of writing and the meanings disseminated by the text which lies at the heart of a reading of Il nome della rosa, the title by which Adso's manuscript is known, although not thus entitled by him. The hermeneutic quest is the central proposition of all detective fiction and the resolution of this quest within the narrative determines the status of the act of writing itself and the accommodation which must be effected between the representation and its referent. The chronological inversion implied by the reference to Holmes is compounded by the temporal construction of the narrative.<sup>56</sup> In compliance with the rigid structuring of the detective genre, the narrative takes place over the course of seven days with one murder occurring or being revealed on each day. Time is further subdivided, not according to the chronological ordering of the clock, but by the equally rigid ordering of the canonical day. In a note to the text, however, the unnamed I points out that the canonical hour varied according to the locality and the season, and also that in the fourteenth

century the order prescribed by St. Benedict would probably not have been adhered to anyway. Again, the effect of this is not merely to inform the reader of historical circumstance, but to undermine the authority which Adso seeks to attribute to his text. Time is not an absolute, but a fluid entity and its measurement proves arbitrary.

In addition to the archetypal sleuth's name, the physical descriptions of Guglielmo also echo Holmes, as perhaps does his predilection for certain herbs, unsuited for the use of the young novice.<sup>57</sup> In his methodology, Guglielmo also recalls Voltaire's *Zadig*, but, moreover, the plot abounds with murder, intrigue, deception and false identity, involving labyrinths, mirrors, secret passages, poison, arcane codes and inscrutable scripts. The over-abundance of these devices seems to overdetermine the status of the text as detective fiction and veer in the direction of overt parody. The significance of each of these devices is, however, linked to the problematics of reading and writing which is central to the text. Each device demands a solution for it conceals a secret, but functions as a sign which does not willingly yield the truth, but serves to deflect the eye from it. Each device both conceals and contains a lie.

Detective fiction is centred round the hermeneutics of identity which are presumed to reveal a truth, and order is restored through its revelation. The devices which we have

mentioned seek to confound the notion of a transparent reading and demand a reader whose knowledge can reconstruct that of their maker who has used them in order to deceive, in order to perpetrate a lie. It can consequently be asserted that in detective fiction, we are faced with the notion of the murderer as a liar, for having committed the crime, he strives to eliminate all traces of his authorship of the crime.

Paradoxically, the act of murder through which he asserted his authorship becomes the locus also of his denial of authority.

The murderer sets out to conceal his traces through the distortion of the text which will lead to him. In opposition, stands the detective whose task is not only to read the clues left behind by the murderer, but also to read tangentially the false signs constructed by the murderer's disavowal of authority, and negotiate the truth of the lie. In A Theory of Semiotics, Eco writes:

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it. Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. 58

The task of the detective equates that of the semiotician. Both seek to make good the absence of things by reconstructing a presence by means of a system of signs, and both are aware that things as well as signs are not necessarily what they seem. It is, therefore, on account of his ability as an astute reader of



signs that Guglielmo is called upon to solve the chain of murder.

In the Postille, Eco remarks that the attraction of the detective genre lies in its being a text of pure conjecture.<sup>59</sup> We should add, however, that in the traditional form, the detective inevitably arrives at the facts, and the murder serves only as a pretext for the resolution whose function is to re-enforce the dominant order. It is, nevertheless, in the realm of pure conjecture which Guglielmo chooses to operate. As he remarks 'tutto può darsi...ma una cosa sola si dà, o si è data, o si sta dando...' (459), but the problem lies in trying to discover this one true thing. In order to do so, Guglielmo has already stated that 'bisogna immaginare tutti gli ordini possibili, e tutti i disordini' (420). The question, therefore, remains as to how the detective is able to orient himself and interpret what signs really mean amidst the disorder.

The positing of the world as a system of signs implies the textualisation of the world as we experience it. Guglielmo quotes:

omnis mundi creatura  
quasi liber et pictura  
nobis est in speculum (31)

Not only do books provide a homology to life, but they are also the condition of our reading of it. After Berengario has recounted to Guglielmo his meeting with Adelmo's ghost, the detective confides to Adso:

quel fantasma mi pare pochissimo fantasma e in ogni caso [Berengario] recitava una pagina che ho già letto su qualche libro a uso dei predicatori. Questi monaci leggono forse troppo, e quando sono eccitati rivivono le visioni che ebbero sui libri. (124-125)

The margins between what lies within books and that which lies outside become obscure as the effects of words create the context of experience. In the end, the word becomes the experience and the world becomes an inter-text.

Given the symbolic role of the Word in Il nome della rosa, it is only fitting that the action of the novel be centred round the monastery's library, the repository of the Word, and that the main participants are all involved with the world of books. For them, the world is indeed text, and it is their relations with the text which determine the course of events. The first victim in the chain of carnage is Adelmo, and Guglielmo's investigations soon lead him to the library which is revealed to be not a peaceful site of learning, but a nest of intrigue, hatred, jealousy, lust and suspicion. Murder is committed out of the frustration of desire, and the desire which permeates the library is the desire for the Word. Access to the Word is not freely granted, for all reading must be vetted and approved by the librarian. As the custodian of the Word, the librarian thus wields great power, for only he has access to the library's inner sanctum where the desired texts lie in store.

Guglielmo also discovers through his study of the library's

catalogue, in effect another sign of signs, that not all the books held by the library may be read by the monks. The desire not only to read, but to make impossible certain readings, indicates the power which is thought to inhere to the Word. Censorship and prohibition can only function if they protect that which is desired most, and the effect of prohibition is not to stultify desire, but to intensify it through its mediation. It becomes apparent to Guglielmo that it is the desire to acquire and the desire to conceal the 'libro proibito' which is at the origin of the series of bloody crimes. It is the desire to possess the forbidden book which motivates the monks, and the significance of this lies not solely in the desire to read, but in the desire to gain the authority of the proscribed text through its appropriation.

It seems possible, therefore, to read the murderous desire of the monks in classical Freudian terms. Their motivation can be interpreted as a desire to re-enact the original crime, the primal killing of the father. This killing is motivated by the desire to usurp the authority of the father, appropriating it for the self and thus assuming the position of the Father. In this world bounded by the authority of the text, it is inevitable that the primal killing be staged in terms of the appropriation of the Word. Adso's own initial appropriation of the words of John may be re-cast citing instead the words of Freud.<sup>60</sup> The forbidden works entombed in the library are considered taboo for the

majority of the monks, and it is only the librarian who assumes the symbolic position of the father who may gaze upon them. The notion of taboo is particularly apt, for it contains both the idea of the sacred and that of the unclean. The forbidden texts are unclean in that familiarity with them will spread the contagion of their discourse, yet their prohibition also marks their veneration. As Freud notes: 'what is sacred was originally nothing more than the prolongation of the will of the primal father'.<sup>61</sup>

The concept of taboo is built on an antithesis which may be explained by the ambivalent emotions which the subject feels with regard to the Father. An object of both love and hatred, his killing is celebrated and expiated, a cause for both mourning and exaltation. In time, the ambivalent emotions surrounding the death of the father serve to intensify rather than vanquish his authority. The word of the father thus becomes a totem attributed with magnificent powers which not only enlighten, but may destroy, whoever should venture to take possession. Guglielmo's remark that '*si usano segni e segni di segni solo quando ci fanno difetto le cose*' (36), becomes doubly significant, for it alludes not only to the constitutive power of the sign, but also to the fact that their use symbolises another reality: signs can be used to 'murder' the object, for they bear all the murderous intent of the primal killing. Similarly, Guglielmo states: '*un sogno è una scrittura, e molte scritture*

non sono altro che sogni' (441). Just as dreams are the disguised fulfilment of repressed desires, so too are texts. For the monks, there is no distinction between text and the world, and their desires are worked out solely in relation to the former.

The relation which has been drawn between the text as the Father and the desire of the subject to appropriate its power is inevitably erotic. Guglielmo unfailingly lays bare a network of homosexual liaisons which illicitly traverse the life of the monastery but, while on one level, it is revealed that sex between men is used as a means by which to barter and exchange the secrets of the library, the definitions of male sexuality also bears another significance. Teresa de Lauretis examines this question and comes to conclude that 'Eco's homo semeioticus may find his most adequate legend in homo-sexuality defined as pedagogy'.<sup>62</sup> She arrives at this position having examined the nature of Guglielmo's relationship with Adso who, as we have noted, defines himself not only as his master's scribe, but also his disciple. Like Holmes and Watson, they are bound by the eroticised master/slave dialectic which marks the dependency of the former on the latter. Guglielmo needs Adso in order to perpetuate his own learning, and in order to achieve this, he needs Adso's desire, for it is Adso's desire which will produce the text. The eroticisation of their relationship is noted by Adso, but is immediately negated. In his prologue, he catalogues

his master's physical attributes and the manner in which he gazed upon him, adding however, 'senza che ombra di lussuria inquina questo modo (forse l'unico purissimo) di amore corporale' (23). His negation serves not to disavow the erotic implications but rather to intensify them. This statement may be paralleled with Adso's remark when he writes of Guglielmo's gift to him, of his miraculous lenses, as they take their leave of each other. He writes:

Ero ancora giovane, mi disse, ma un giorno  
sarebbero le lenti tornate utili (e invero le  
tengo sul naso, ora che scrivo queste righe).  
Poi mi abbracciò forte, con la tenerezza di un  
padre, e mi congedò. (500-501)

Guglielmo's gift stands as a symbol of the transmission of his authority on to his disciple.<sup>63</sup> It is the symbol of the male fantasy of self-procreation which, in this instance, involves the handing down of the authoritative tradition of knowledge. Within the boundaries of the text, it is significant that the only name which is absent from Adso's manuscript, is the name of the girl with whom he had his furtive encounter in the kitchen and whose anonymity situates women as other, firmly outside learned authority.

This argument may appear to have taken us to a point whereby we must revoke our earlier suggestion that the text undermines the authority of the narrator. An exploration of the means by which the detective's enquiry is resolved will, however, redress

the focus of our study.

We expect that in detective fiction, the superior acumen of the detective triumphs in order to reveal the culprit and confirm the power of reason even if we may find this power, at times, uncanny. Il nome della rosa contains many of the classic features of the genre, but we have suggested that Eco uses them in order to subvert the fictions which they construct. It is, however, through the conclusion that this subversion is enacted, at the very point where detective fiction normally asserts its achievement. The paradox of the ending in detective fiction has been noted by Franco Moretti:

Detective fiction's ending is its end indeed: its solution in the true sense. The fabula narrated by the detective in his reconstruction of the facts brings us back to the beginning; that is, it abolishes narration.<sup>64</sup>

Moretti underestimates the cathartic effect of narrative, but his thesis is valid. Detective fiction only tells us what happened before the narrative began. It serves as its own pretext, and once the 'solution' is revealed, the narrative consumes itself and hence abolishes its need. As we shall see, the conclusion of Il nome della rosa functions rather differently.

Throughout the novel, Guglielmo offers many displays of his semiotic virtuosity, beginning with his reading of the tracks of Brunellus, through his unravelling of the secrets of the library to the disclosure of the murderer. Ultimately, however, he is



defeated, for despite successfully identifying Jorge as the prime mover behind the crimes, he arrives at the correct solution through a misreading of the clues. Guglielmo reads the deaths in terms of the apocalyptic sequence suggested to him by the elderly, senile Alinardo, but he is mistaken. De Lauretis writes:

non era quella la chiave dei delitti a catena. Anzi, la chiave non c'era, ogni crimine aveva un autore diverso oppure nessuno, il disegno non esisteva, e c'erano invece una serie di cause e di concause le cui relazioni non dipendevano tanto dal disegno di un autore quanto dal progetto di un lettore, in questo caso, Guglielmo.<sup>65</sup>

Here she echoes Guglielmo's confession to Adso:

Sono arrivato a Jorge attraverso uno schema apocalittico che sembrava reggere tutti i delitti, eppure era casuale. Sono arrivato a Jorge cercando un autore di tutti i crimini e abbiamo scoperto che ogni crimine aveva in fondo un autore diverso, oppure nessuno. Sono arrivato a Jorge inseguendo il disegno di una mente perversa e raziocinante, e non v'era alcun disegno, ovvero Jorge stesso era stato sopraffatto dal proprio disegno iniziale e dopo era iniziata una catena di cause, e di concause, e di cause in contraddizione tra loro che avevano proceduto per conto proprio, creando relazioni che non dipendevano da alcun disegno. (495)

Guglielmo is defeated by his own over-evaluation of reason, and becomes trapped by his obsession to find the 'disegno' and impose a single meaning at all costs. Not only has the detective been thwarted in the celebration of his logic, but the fundamental tenets of the detective genre, identity and agency, are thrown into question.

The narrative reveals that while Jorge did poison the pages of the forbidden text, so that the avid reader would, in effect, be punished by his own desire to read on, he himself had no part in the series of murders which developed of their own accord. The sequence of deaths is shown to be determined by desire itself, for it is desire which impels each of the victims to seek out that which has been forbidden. The 'murderer' cannot be collated with a single agent or 'autore', but can rather be located in the primal desire to appropriate the position of the Father through the possession of his Word. It can, therefore, be asserted that the culprit, the totem figure of the genre, cannot be designated simply as other, but resides in the collective desire of the primal killing. The subject is murdered by the text and is murdered on account of the desire to violate its acknowledged position of supremacy. The metaphor of the library as labyrinth symbolises the symbolic order and the erasure of the subject within that order.

The hazards of engaging too closely with the library are signalled prophetically by Alinardo who warns that '*la biblioteca è un gran labirinto, segno del labirinto del mondo. Entri e non sai se uscirai. Non bisogna violare le colonne d'Ercole*' (163). The pillars of Hercules must, nevertheless, be transgressed, and it is upon this violation that society is founded. The law of the Father must be broken if it is to continue. In Adso's narrative, this law is symbolised by the authority of the

librarian, but Malachia is merely an emasculated symbol for he functions only as a surrogate for the blind Jorge. After Malachia's death, the fraternal horde engage in a fierce battle in order to attain his position, for it is the position of the Father, the position of authority over the Word. This position is purely imaginary, for he who seems to occupy the position of the Father is merely a metonymic extension of another, a substitute. Thus, the Abbot, the central authority within the abbey, derives his power from being a substitute for the Pope who, in turn, is God's representative on earth. The Abbot, however, does not in fact command the abbey for it comes to light that Jorge, the blind custodian of the library's secrets, holds sway over the Abbot on account of the authority which he wields over the Word.<sup>66</sup>

The importance of the relationship between the subject and language emerges in the debates surrounding the Papacy and its various heretical factions. These struggles are not based on articles of faith, but rather on who has the power to tell the truth, or rather, to impose his version. Guglielmo remarks that *'tutte le eresie sono bandiera di una realtà dell'esclusione'* (206) and suggests that whoever interprets the Word differently, is marginalised through adopting an incorrect position in relation to the Word. The heretic is he who stands on the other side of meaning.

The duel between detective and criminal, characteristic of the genre, is figured in the relationship between Guglielmo and Jorge. Inevitably, it is a relationship which is built around texts and the meaning which each attributes to the text. Both appear to believe in the inviolability of the sign yet each reacts to this in different ways. Guglielmo is a reader who seeks to establish the relationship between signs and who believes that while meaning is a product of these relationships, it is not transparent and can only be elicited gradually and partially. Meaning emerges in the space between reader and text. He tells Adso:

I libri non sono fatti per crederci, ma per essere sottoposti a indagine. Di fronte a un libro non dobbiamo chiederci cosa dica ma cosa vuol dire... (319)

Conversely, Jorge exhibits a more literal credence in the power of the word. He is initially seen berating the work of Adelmo whose illustrations depict the world 'a rovescio'. Laughter and irony are the tools of the devil, for God's word is indivisible and its purity must be preserved. The piety of the monastery can only be upheld through the work of the scribes who copy, without interpretation, the past works of the masters. In this, he recalls the opening words of Adso who writes that the 'compito del monaco fedele sarebbe ripetere ogni giorno con salmodiante umiltà l'unico immodificabile evento di cui si possa asserire l'incontrovertibile verità' (19). Whereas Guglielmo believes that 'il bene di un libro sta nell'essere letto' (399), Jorge is intent on concealment and on turning the library into a mausoleum

so that the Pillars of Hercules may remain inviolate. Unable to maintain complete material control over access to the library, Jorge's poisoning of the text aims to ensure that the text once violated, cannot be disseminated by the reader/criminal.

At this point, it is interesting to note that the roles of detective and criminal have been reversed. While Guglielmo seeks to track down the murderer by reading the clues aright, Jorge aims to police and suppress the dissemination of clues in advance. Moretti notes:

the clue is...that particular element of the story in which the link between signifier and signified is altered. It is a signifier that always has several signifieds and thus produces numerous suspicions... This is also part of the criminal's guilt: he has created a situation of semantic ambiguity, thus questioning the usual forms of human communication and human interaction. In this way, he has composed an audacious poetic work. The detective, on the other hand, must dispel the entropy, the cultural equiprobability that is produced by and is a relevant aspect of the crime: he will have to reinstate the univocal links between signifiers and signifieds.<sup>67</sup>

If the task of the detective is to re-establish order from disorder, that of Jorge is to pre-empt such an initiative by repressing the possibility of 'semantic ambiguity'.<sup>68</sup> For Jorge, reading is the repetition of the primal killing which he seeks to avenge through the velenous parchment. His vengeful wrath is, nevertheless, narcissistic, for it betrays his own desire to master the text. His inability to destroy the iniquitous text in the first place, reveals his need to usurp the text's authority.

His desire is most fully realised in the manner in which the text is finally consumed by him. On learning that Guglielmo has discovered the means by which he sealed the secrets of Aristotle's lost text and has protected himself from its poison, Jorge seizes the book and begins to devour it:

Incominciò con le sue mani scarnite e diafane a lacerare lentamente, a brani e a strisce, le pagine molli del manoscritto, ponendosele a brandelli in bocca, e masticando lentamente come se consumasse l'ostia e volesse farla carne della propria carne. (483)

The symbolism of the host comments tellingly on Jorge's desire to be invested with the divine properties of the text through its material assimilation. His narcissistic act of destruction is compounded as he knocks the lamp from Adso's hands thus leading to the conflagration which engulfs the abbey.

The dichotomy which exists in detective fiction between the god-like hero and the diabolic villain is subverted by the narrative. Both Jorge and Guglielmo see the other as the incarnation of the devil or Antichrist. Their opposing positions bring them into conflict, yet what they both desire is mastery over the Word. In the end, both fail, for Guglielmo's reason is defeated and his tracing of Jorge is coincidental while Jorge instigates a series of murders, not the product of his intent, but with a structure of their own which exceeds his design. Jorge perishes in the biblioclasm while Guglielmo vanishes leaving Adso, the narrator, to restore the authority of the text.

In our discussion of Il nome della rosa, we appear to have said comparatively little about its first person narrator. Like Dr Watson, Adso is little more than an onlooker, yet it is only through his telling that the apocalyptic events of 1327 come to be known. What we read, however, is not Adso's text, but the script of someone else's reading of his text, filtered through a series of other texts. The overtly fictional nature of the narrative's presentation serves to highlight the inauthenticity of what we have called Adso's manuscript. The unreality of the text is glimpsed by Adso at the close of his narrative when he remembers the occasion on which he returned to the abbey, some years after its destruction, to find the spot barren and deserted. In the ruins of the monastery, he discovers fragments of books which had escaped the flames and proceeds to gather together all the scraps, taking them back with him to piece together the remnants of the library. He writes:

alla fine della mia paziente ricomposizione mi  
si disegnò come una biblioteca minore, segno di  
quella maggiore scomparsa, una biblioteca fatta  
di brani, citazioni, periodi incompiuti,  
moncherini di libri. (502)

Throughout the years, Adso has consulted these fragments as if they were an oracle which, on occasions, would seem to yield their secrets, while on others, prove recalcitrant to any interpretation. It is with this in mind that Adso turns to his own text, concluding: 'più rileggo questo elenco più mi convinco che esso è effetto del caso e non contiene alcun messaggio' (502). His account which had begun with such conviction, bound



to the dual authorities of God and History, ends by suggesting its own meaninglessness as just a chance concatenation of words. Adso imagines his own death as a return to indifferenciation as opposed to language which lives on in the continuous play on the signifier. His last words: 'cadrò nella divinità silenziosa e disabitata dove non c'è opera né immagine' (503) seem to cancel out the notion that the subject might be redeemed through writing, yet as Adso, too, takes his leave, there is still a substantial piece of text which, although recalcitrant to meaning, is indubitably there.

The idea of the manuscript as the fragmented reflection of the library was incorporated by Bompiani into their marketing strategy heralding the novel's publication.<sup>69</sup> The publishers identified three types of reader who might be attracted to the diverse aspects of the work. The first category was to be attracted by the detective plot, the second, captivated by the intellectual debates, but the third group 'si renderà conto che questo testo è un tessuto di altri testi, un 'giallo' di citazioni, un libro fatto di libri'.<sup>70</sup> The idea of a 'giallo di citazioni' demonstrates a shift in interest from the site of writing to that of reading. This latter activity is posited as the hermeneutic pivot of the work, and the reading process constitutes the work's authority. De Lauretis notes:

It Il nome della rosa is a novel made up almost entirely of other texts, of tales already told, of names already well-known or sounding as if they should be known to us from

literary and cultural history; a medley of famous passages and obscure quotations, specialized lexicons and subcodes (narrative, iconographic, literary, architectural, bibliographical, pharmaceutical et cetera), and characters cut out in strips from a generic World Encyclopedia.<sup>71</sup>

Adso's manuscript, just like the inscrutable greek and arabic scripts of which he writes, becomes a code which must be deciphered by a reader who will recognise and reassemble the textual collage which is Adso's narrative. Not all readers (if any) will have the competence to trace each piece of quoted text to its original source, and although authority for the text comes to be vested in the eye of the reader, each reader is free, or bound, to interpret the text according to his or her knowledge of the eclectic sources on which the narrative draws. If we recognise a fragment of language as a quotation from another text, we establish a particular relationship between the signifier and the signified based on the intertextual referent.<sup>72</sup> We cannot, however, conclude that this relationship establishes a transcendent level of interpretation, for failure to recognise and attribute the quoted fragment does not result in fumbling with a meaningless piece of language, but simply in a piece of language which means something else. Nor can it be asserted that through perceiving one text across another, the meaning produced is necessarily more resonant, for as the title of the novel indicates, the greater the intertextual referent, the less meaning is produced.<sup>73</sup>

Just as Guglielmo cracks the narrative code which binds the sequence of murders, but in doing so unmasks his own failure, the reader can never claim absolute authority over the narrative for the relationship between the signifier and signified is one which not only is subject to modification, but also inhibits, at every stage of its production, the notion of itself as a monolithic voice. In the Postile, Eco advocates that the text is its own authority, for once it has been given over to public consumption, it ceases to be a product of the author's intent.<sup>74</sup> De Lauretis takes the argument further when she contends that the novel 'has no authorial voice and hence no author-ity of its own, for every scrap of discourse - every description, incident or character, every turn of phrase, narrative styleme, metaphor or metonymy - is an objet trouvé...'.<sup>75</sup> This position belies her earlier claim that one must consider Il nome della rosa to be 'a pre-meditated lie', for the notion of the lie re-introduces the concept of authority, designating an agent with the power over the sign to obfuscate its meaning and subvert its intent. It is Eco whom she denotes as a liar, but it is Adso who is the collector of the 'objet trouvé', for as he assembles the past, he lays no claim to authority, hence no claim to the lie.

For Eco, Adso may well be a feint, a fourteenth century monk concealing a twentieth century intellect, yet it is with Adso that the modernity of the text lies. Like the nameless narrator

of Todo modo, Adso refuses to lay claim to the power of the word, for its deployment reveals the illusory nature of its possession. Guglielmo, Jorge and don Gaetano are all defeated for presuming to wield power over the sign - whereas Adso and his counterpart in Todo modo refuse to adopt the imaginary position of 'maître absolu'. Adso recognises that authority lies elsewhere and, unlike Guglielmo, does not presume that it can adhere to a single reader. Nor can it be asserted that authority lies with the text, for a text is always an intertext, and its very existence is dependent upon other fragments which, in turn, lead elsewhere.

Adso's narrative ends where it had begun, with God and the Word, but unlike traditional detective fiction, avoids the trap of signalling its own negation. Writing is not a lie, but rather a distortion, as in the words of St Paul cited by Adso: 'videmus nunc per speculum et in aenigmate' (19) to which we might add the words of Freud:

in its implications the distortion of a text resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed but in getting rid of its traces.<sup>76</sup>

Both writing and murder imply agency, yet their execution necessitates concealment and the renunciation of authority. The detective cannot restore that which the murder had created, for his narrative implies his own erasure. We can perhaps conclude by completing the quotation from St Paul, begun by Adso, which may serve as the text for all writers of the self:

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then

face to face: now I know in part but then I  
shall know even as also I am known.<sup>77</sup>

Notes to Chapter 7

1. Stefano Tani, The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1983).
2. See Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative, pp.31-32. For an interesting account of how writers of detective fiction view their own art see The Mystery Writers Handbook, edited by L. Treat, (Cincinnati, 1976).
3. See Tani pp.114-134.
4. For an account of the origins and the development of this idea see Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Fraser, The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder, (Cambridge, 1987).
5. Tani pp.1-34.
6. Tzvetan Todorov, 'Typologie du roman policier', in Poétique de la Prose, (Paris, 1971), pp.55-65, (p.57).
7. See Tani esp. pp.4-6.
8. Tani pp.4-10.
9. Tani perhaps underestimates the unconventional quality of certain of Christie's solutions. As well as the by now infamous Murder of Roger Ackroyd, we might also cite Curtains: Poirot's Last Case, in which the detective engineers his own murder so that the culprit might be trapped.
10. Todorov, p.58.
11. Todorov, p.59.
12. For the use made of the detective genre in 'post-modern' narrative see Hutcheon and also Patricia Waugh, Metafiction, pp.82-84.
13. Tani, pp.52-76. Tani includes Il nome della rosa in this category but as will become apparent our argument reverses Tani's hierarchy of subversion.
14. Tani, pp.76-112. Here Tani includes Todo modo which we go on to discuss in this chapter pp.292-308.
15. See esp. pp.306-308.
16. Tani, pp.113-147.
17. Patricia Waugh, Metafiction p.82.

18. Todorov, p.58.
19. Philippe Renard in 'Les Lunettes de Sciascia', L'Arc, 77, (1979), 23-34, (p.29) suggests that this claim is merely a 'boutade'. Whether or not this is the case, it already points to the difficulty that the reader will have in establishing the 'truth' of the text.
20. Renard notes: 'l'acteur de Todo modo n'est plus un héros pas plus qu'un anti-héros, ce n'est guère qu'un rôle anonyme et pourtant c'est un personnage', (p.24).
21. Ricciarda Ricorda in 'Sciascia ovvero la retorica della citazione', Studi novecenteschi 16, (1977), 59-93, estimates that there are 20 direct quotations plus around 30 'riferimenti dotti' in Todo modo.
22. Ricorda notes that the quotation in the opening paragraph refers not only to Debenedetti and Pirandello for Sciascia had previously used the quotation in Pirandello e la Sicilia, offering an interesting and extreme example of self-referentiality. Ricorda, p.59.
23. In a psychoanalytical reading of detective fiction, the enclosed community permits a closer approximation of the Oedipal crisis.
24. Giovanna Jackson in Leonardo Sciascia 1956-1976, (Ravenna, 1981) writes: 'among these pillars of society there is one who will murder three of his associates for reasons that remain completely obscure... The murderer remains unknown, there is no apparent motive, no abettor, no hired assassin, no method' (pp.88-89). She appears to be the only critic to effect such a naive reading.
25. Sciascia in La Sicilia come metafora, (Turin, 1979) remarks of the police: 'sono onesti e rigorosi, animati da buoni principi, quei principi ai quali si ispira ogni stato democratico, ma loro sono praticamente ridotti all'impotenza' (p.67). In Todo modo, there is no suggestion that the police investigators are corrupt like the representatives of the ruling class, merely ineffective.
26. Renard writes: 'dans Todo modo l'assassin semble rester anonyme car tous pourraient l'être comme tous pourraient être victimes' (p.26). In the Freudian context of the family romance, it is clear that the minister wishes to dispel his own guilt at the return of the repressed.
27. Jackson writes that the narrator 'is simply the spectator who does not participate in any way in the action before his eyes'



(p.104), again revealing a very literal approach to the problems of the text.

28. Tani, pp.81-82. Renard also emphasises this point. See Renard, p.26.
29. Renard prefers to see the relationship between the narrator and don Gaetano in terms of opposites rather than doubles. The narrator as Christ exorcises the satanic don Gaetano. This is in keeping with the tone of his article which emphasises the working out of the debate with catholicism in the novel.
30. Sigmund Freud, 'A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis' in Pelican Freud Library, vol.14, translated by James Strachey, (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp.377-423.
31. Freud, 'A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis', p.399.
32. Sigmund Freud, 'the Uncanny' in Pelican Freud Library, vol.14, pp.335-376.
33. Freud, 'The Uncanny', p.358.
34. Freud, 'The Uncanny', p.356.
35. Calvino, in a letter to Sciascia reprinted in Forum Italicum vol.15, no.1 (1981), 70-72, finds that no.460 of Pascal's Pensées in the edition to which he had recourse is different to that cited by don Gaetano. The one discovered by Calvino offers an interesting insight into the debate on spectacles:  
 Combien les lunettes nous ont-elles découvert d'astres qui n'étaient point pour nos philosophes d'auparavant! On entreprenait franchement l'Ecriture sainte sur le grand nombre des étoiles, en disant: "Il n'y en a que mille vingt-deux nous les savons"... O présomptueux! voici un trait délicat. - Il ne faut pas dire qu'il y a ce qu'on ne voit pas. - Il faut donc dire comme les autres, mais ne pas penser comme eux'.  
 This is taken from the standard Pleiade edition (Paris, 1954) p.1218.
36. Renard remarks that although don Gaetano may not have committed the murders, 'le seul constat acceptable serait la culpabilité directe de don Gaetano qui, manifestement connaît tout des deux meurtres' (p.30).
37. The celibacy of don Gaetano aims to allow him to transcend the compulsive structure of the Oedipal situation yet he is nevertheless killed by the phallic revolver. His position of transcendence is illusory. Claude Ambroise in Invito alla

lettura di Sciascia, (Milan, 1978) also adopts a Freudian perspective and notes: 'in cambio della pistola lasciata accanto al cadavere, l'artista tiene in mano la matita o la penna' (p.167). The narrative act symbolises the narrator's assumption of the role of the Father.

38. Renard and Ambroise both argue that the narrator is the murderer.
39. In Christie's, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, the first person narrator is also the murderer, a fact which is concealed until the dénouement. Roland Barthes in 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' in Communications 8, pp.7-33, (p.26) refers to this 'abuse' of the solution as a 'truquage' because it depends solely on the duplicity of the narrator who, as a witness, ought to tell the truth.
40. Ambroise, p.204.
41. This aspect of the text is underlined by Calvino in his letter to Sciascia.
42. Renard feels that the reference to Les Caves du Vatican confirms the narrator's guilt yet he does not take into account the fact that Lafcadio's 'atto di libertà' remains a failure. Ambroise, conversely, identifies the narrator with Antime, another character in the novel, whose experiences cause him finally to re-adopt a secular position. The narrator, therefore, is not Christ.
43. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Purloined Letter' in The Works of Edgar A. Poe, vol.1. (Edinburgh, 1874) pp.494-513 (p.497).
44. Poe, p.497.
45. Jacques Lacan, 'Le Séminaire sur "La Lettre volée"', in Ecrits 1, (Paris, 1966), 19-75.
46. Lacan, p.43.
47. See chapter 1, pp.28-31.
48. Umberto Eco, Postille a il nome della rosa, (Milan, 1984). For Eco's views on the question of the narrator see pp.20-24.
49. Eco considers Adso's naivety to be a contributing factor to the popularity of the novel 'da parte di lettori non sofisticati'. Postille, p.23.
50. See Hayden White, 'The value of narrativity in the

- representation of reality' in Critical Inquiry, 7 (1980), 5-27, for a discussion of the relationship between narrative and the chronicle.
51. The confessional aspect of first person narrative is a strategy which we have noted throughout; seriously in Le confessioni di un italiano, playfully in Il cavaliere inesistente. Eco exploits both positions.
  52. The opening obviously recalls that of I promessi sposi. Teresa de Lauretis in 'Gaudy Rose: Eco and narcissism', Substance, 47, (1985), 13-29, (p.16) claims the unnamed I to be 'presumably Eco', an interesting example of the desire to identify the speaking subject at all costs, even at the expense of the text itself.
  53. Renato Giovannoli in his introduction to Saggi su 'Il nome della rosa', (Milan, 1985) draws up a table to illustrate similarities between this and other 'detective' novels. His table seems to suggest that Il nome della rosa may be considered the Novel from which all others are derived. See pp.16-17.
  54. See above note 23.
  55. It may be more accurate to argue that the novel is historical in that it is 'typical' of the time of its writing rather than of that in which it is supposedly set.
  56. Alberto Cadioli in L'industria del romanzo, (Rome, 1981) notes that one of Bompiani's marketing ploys at the time of the novel's publication was the question 'cosa accadrà nel 1327?', playing with the tension between the hermeneutic thrust of the narrative and its historical referent. See Cadioli, p.173.
  57. For a discussion of the similarities between Guglielmo and Holmes, see de Lauretis, pp.17-19.
  58. Umberto Eco, A Theory of Semiotics, (London, 1977), p.7.
  59. See Eco, Postille, pp.31-32. This is perhaps not unlike Eco's concept of 'semiosi illimitata', one of the key ideas behind his theoretical writing.
  60. Freud ends his essay 'Totem and Taboo' quoting the words of Goethe: 'In the beginning was the Deed', offering an interesting parallel with Adso's first words in his tale of primal murder. See Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and Taboo' in Pelican Freud Library, vol.13, pp.43-224, (p.224).

61. Sigmund Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism' in Pelican Freud Library, vol.13, pp.237-386, (p.369).
62. De Lauretis, p.24.
63. The significance of the eyes may be traced to the Oedipus legend where the hero blinds himself upon realising his crime. Spectacles may, therefore, be regarded as symbolising the phallus for they supplement the potency of the eye.
64. Franco Moretti, 'Clues' in Signs Taken for Wonders, translated by Susan Fischer, David Forgacs and David Miller, (London, 1983), p.148.
65. Teresa de Lauretis, Umberto Eco, (Florence, 1981), p.85.
66. Jorge's blindness may be said to symbolise his castration in relation to the Word. See above note 63.
67. Moretti, p.146. In this context, it may be argued that the criminal is not unlike the author of the 'open work'.
68. For a discussion of the role of disorder and order in the work of Eco, see David Robey, 'Umberto Eco', in Writers and Society in Contemporary Italy, edited by Michael Caesar and Peter Hainsworth, (Leamington Spa, 1984), pp.63-88.
69. See Cadioli, pp.173-174.
70. Cadioli, p.173.
71. De Lauretis, 'Gaudy Rose: Eco and narcissism', pp.16-17.
72. In this case, the referent can only be another signifier, so consequently we return to Eco's notion of unlimited semiosis.
73. This is also the case with the novel's title where the over-determination of the signifier leads to an excess hence dearth of signification. See Eco, Postille, pp.7-8.
74. See Eco, Postille, p.10. Eco's 'appendix' to his novel may, however, be read as a belated attempt to retain mastery over 'his' text.
75. De Lauretis, 'Gaudy Rose: Eco and Narcissism', p.19. The incorporation of other texts into Il nome della rosa is quite different from the technique employed by Sciascia who consciously cites his sources. Eco's work is more an overt example of Kristeva's notion of 'intertextualité'. See Julia Kristeva, 'The Bounded Text' in Desire in Language, edited by Leon S. Roudiez, (Oxford, 1980), pp.36-63, (pp.36-38).

76. Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism', p.283.

77. 1 Corinthians 13.12.

## Conclusion

Characteristic for the novel as a genre is not the image of a man in his own right, but a man who is precisely the image of a language. (Bakhtin).

The words of St Paul and the image of the Aedificium which dominates Il nome della rosa can, in a sense, be said to summarise the content of our study. Firstly, the notion of the world as a verbal construct whose constitution is ever precarious, is one which has been seen to inhabit, albeit in a variety of ways, all the texts which we have studied. Further, it has become apparent that while each text seeks to represent the I in writing, the I which is uncovered, is subject to a continual deferral of meaning and, consequently, cannot stand as the transcendental signifier which would confer absolute meaning onto the text. We have moved from texts which display an overt historical referent through to texts which betray an awareness of their own status as fiction, yet in each text the purpose has remained the same: to demonstrate the performance of the I in language. Throughout our study we have adhered to Beneveniste's notion that language is the condition and the ground on which subjectivity is constructed and we have treated each text as a performance in that medium. The proliferation of images of death seems to highlight the fact that the I is constantly endangered with erasure from the very medium through which it would gain recognition. Occupying an uneasy position midway between the

poles of 'discours' and of 'histoire', the narrating I is involved in a perpetual address of the other which it seeks both to master but also court, for it is recognition by the other which will validate the I's discourse. The terrible revelation made by first person narrative is the absolute dependency of the I on the other, for alone, the I ceases to signify. The I is dependent both psychically and culturally on this relationship and at most, as we witnessed in the final chapter, can subvert it through consciously working against its conventions, but this in itself constitutes a recognition of the manner in which the I comes to signify. To romance the abyss of first person narration is to reveal that the man is not both 'subject and object' of the narrative, but doubly subject to his performance in discourse.

Our choice of texts has necessarily been selective, but it is hoped that some of the ideas expressed in this study will find a wider application. The purpose of the study was not to produce another typology of first person narrative, but to examine the manner in which first person narration can be said to function. The texts on which this thesis concentrates, despite being extremely varied, have in common an awareness of the literary nature of their production and demonstrate some anxiety regarding the consequences of this. They all belong to a relatively short period in history, but unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the conditions which might have determined the reasons for their similarities. Neither have we



been able to address the question of gender and the first person pronoun, but this topic is equally vast and rather than offer a cursory treatment of it, it is perhaps better to leave the discussion to a later date.

As a conclusion to a study which has attempted to deal with the question of the self as text, it is perhaps fitting to end by quoting some of Calvino's last words on the subject. In his essay 'Molteplicità', Calvino broaches the idea that the contemporary novel is indeed a kind of encyclopedia, a maze of references and cross-references, but he takes his argument further, and his conclusion may also serve as a conclusion to this study, indicating the multitude of significations which the first person pronoun bears. He writes:

Qualcuno potrà obiettare che più l'opera tende alla moltiplicazione dei possibili più s'allontana da quell'unicum che è il self di chi scrive, la sincerità interiore, la scoperta della propria verità. Al contrario, rispondo, chi siamo noi, chi è ciascuno di noi se non una combinatoria d'esperienze, d'informazioni, di letture, d'immaginazioni? Ogni vita è un'enciclopedia, una biblioteca, un inventario d'oggetti, un campionario di stili, dove tutto può essere continuamente rimescolato e riordinato in tutti i modi possibili.<sup>1</sup>

Note

- 1 Italo Calvino, 'Molteplicità', in Lezioni Americane, pp.101-120, (p.120).

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